

UNCLE WILLY

and Other Stories



William Faulkner

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Shingles for the Lord

PAP GOT UP a good hour before daylight and caught the mule and rid down to Killebrews' to borrow the froe and maul. He ought to been back with it in forty minutes. But the sun had rose and I had done milked and fed and was eating my breakfast when he got back, with the mule not only in a lather but right on the edge of the thumps too.

"Fox hunting," he said. "Fox hunting. A seventy-year-old man, with both feet and one knee, too, already in the grave, squatting all night on a hill and calling himself listening to a fox race that he couldn't even hear unless they had come right up onto the same log he was setting on and bayed into his ear trumpet. Give me my breakfast," he told maw. "Whitfield is standing there right this minute, straddle of that board tree with his watch in his hand."

And he was. We rid on past the church, and there was not only Solon Quick's school-bus truck but Reverend Whitfield's old mare too. We tied the mule to a sapling and hung our dinner bucket on a limb, and with pap toting Killebrew's froe and maul and the wedges and me toting our ax, we went on to the board tree where Solon and Homer Bookwright, with their froes and mauls and axes and wedges, was setting on two upended cuts, and Whitfield was standing jest like pap said, in his boiled shirt and his black hat and pants and necktie, holding his watch in his hand. It was gold and in

the morning sunlight it looked big as a full-grown squash.

"You're late," he said.

So pap told again about how Old Man Killegrew had been off fox hunting all night, and nobody at home to lend him the froe but Mrs. Killegrew and the cook. And naturally, the cook wasn't going to lend none of Killegrew's tools out, and Mrs. Killegrew was worser deaf than even Killegrew. If you was to run in and tell her the house was afire, she would jest keep on rocking and say she thought so, too, unless she began to holler back to the cook to turn the dogs loose before you could even open your mouth.

"You could have gone yesterday and borrowed the froe," Whitfield said. "You have known for a month now that you had promised this one day out of a whole summer toward putting a roof on the house of God."

"We ain't but two hours late," pap said. "I reckon the Lord will forgive it. He ain't interested in time, nohow. He's interested in salvation."

Whitfield never even waited for pap to finish. It looked to me like he even got taller, thundering down at pap like a cloudburst. "He ain't interested in neither! Why should He be, when He owns them both? And why He should turn around for the poor, mizzling souls of men that can't even borrow tools in time to replace the shingles on His church, I don't know either. Maybe it's just because He made them. Maybe He just said to Himself: 'I made them; I don't know why. But since I did, I Godfrey, I'll roll My sleeves up and drag them into glory whether they will or no!'"

But that wasn't here nor there either now, and I reckon he knowed it, jest like he knowed there wasn't going to be nothing atall here as long as he stayed. So he put the watch back into his pocket and motioned Solon and Homer up, and we all taken off our hats except him while he stood there with his face raised into the sun and his eyes shut and

his eyebrows looking like a big iron-gray caterpillar lying along the edge of a cliff. "Lord," he said, "make them good straight shingles to lay smooth, and let them split out easy; they're for You," and opened his eyes and looked at us again, mostly at pap, and went and untied his mare and clumb up slow and stiff, like old men do, and rid away.

Pap put down the froe and maul and laid the three wedges in a neat row on the ground and taken up the ax.

"Well, men," he said, "let's get started. We're already late."

"Me and Homer ain't," Solon said. "We was here." This time him and Homer didn't set on the cuts. They squatted on their heels. Then I seen that Homer was whittling on a stick. I hadn't noticed it before. "I make it two hours and a little over," Solon said. "More or less."

Pap was still about half stooped over, holding the ax. "It's nigher one," he said. "But call it two for the sake of the argument. What about it?"

"What argument?" Homer said.

"All right," pap said. "Two hours then. What about it?"

"Which is three man-hour units a hour, multiplied by two hours," Solon said. "Or a total of six work units." When the WPA first come to Yoknapatawpha County and started to giving out jobs and grub and mattresses, Solon went in to Jefferson to get on it. He would drive his school-bus truck the twenty-two miles in to town every morning and come back that night. He done that for almost a week before he found out he would not only have to sign his farm off into somebody else's name, he couldn't even own and run the school bus that he had built himself. So he come back that night and never went back no more, and since then hadn't nobody better mention WPA to him unless they aimed to fight, too, though every now and then he would turn up with something all figured down into work units like he done now. "Six units short."

"Four of which you and Homer could have already worked out while you was setting here waiting on me," pap said.

"Except that we didn't," Solon said. "We promised Whitfield two units of twelve three-unit hours toward getting some new shingles on the church roof. We been here ever since sunup, waiting for the third unit to show up, so we could start. You don't seem to kept up with these modern ideas about work that's been flooding and uplifting the country in the last few years."

"What modren ideas?" pap said. "I didn't know there was but one idea about work—until it is done, it ain't done, and when it is done, it is."

Homer made another long, steady whittle on the stick. His knife was sharp as a razor.

Solon taken out his snuffbox and filled the top and tilted the snuff into his lip and offered the box to Homer, and Homer shaken his head, and Solon put the top back on the box and put the box back into his pocket.

"So," pap said, "jest because I had to wait two hours for a old seventy-year man to get back from fox hunting that never had no more business setting out in the woods all night than he would 'a' had setting all night in a highway juke joint, we all three have got to come back here tomorrow to finish them two hours that you and Homer ——"

"I ain't," Solon said. "I don't know about Homer. I promised Whitfield one day. I was here at sunup to start it. When the sun goes down, I will consider I have done finished it."

"I see," pap said. "I see. It's me that's got to come back. By myself. I got to break into a full morning to make up them two hours that you and Homer spent resting. I got to spend two hours of the next day making up for the two hours of the day before that you and Homer never even worked."

"It's going to more than jest break into a morning," Solon

said. "It's going to wreck it. There's six units left over. Six one-man-hour units. Maybe you can work twice as fast as me and Homer put together and finish them in four hours, but I don't believe you can work three times as fast and finish in two."

Pap was standing up now. He was breathing hard. We could hear him. "So," he said. "So." He swung the ax and druv the blade into one of the cuts and snatched it up onto its flat end, ready to split. "So I'm to be penalized a half a day of my own time, from my own work that's waiting for me at home right this minute, to do six hours more work than the work you fellers lacked two hours of even doing atall, purely and simply because I am jest a average hard-working farmer trying to do the best he can, instead of a durn froe-owning millionaire named Quick or Bookwright."

They went to work then, splitting the cuts into bolts and riving the bolts into shingles for Tull and Snopes and the others that had promised for tomorrow to start nailing onto the church roof when they finished pulling the old shingles off. They set flat on the ground in a kind of circle, with their legs spraddled out on either side of the propped-up bolt, Solon and Homer working light and easy and steady as two clocks ticking, but pap making every lick of hisn like he was killing a moccasin. If he had jest swung the maul half as fast as he swung it hard, he would have rove as many shingles as Solon and Homer together, swinging the maul up over his head and holding it there for what looked like a whole minute sometimes and then swinging it down onto the blade of the froe, and not only a shingle flying off every lick but the froe going on into the ground clean up to the helve eye, and pap setting there wrenching at it slow and steady and hard, like he jest wished it would try to hang on a root or a rock and stay there.

"Here, here," Solon said. "If you don't watch out you

won't have nothing to do neither during them six extra units tomorrow morning but rest."

Pap never even looked up. "Get out of the way," he said. And Solon done it. If he hadn't moved the water bucket, pap would have split it, too, right on top of the bolt, and this time the whole shingle went whirling past Solon's shin jest like a scythe blade.

"What you ought to do is to hire somebody to work out them extra overtime units," Solon said.

"With what?" Pap said. "I ain't had no WPA experience in dickering over labor. Get out of the way."

But Solon had already moved this time. Pap would have had to change his whole position or else made this one curve. So this one missed Solon, too, and pap set there wrenching the froe, slow and hard and steady, back out of the ground.

"Maybe there's something else besides cash you might be able to trade with," Solon said. "You might use that dog."

That was when pap actually stopped. I didn't know it myself then either, but I found it out a good long time before Solon did. Pap set there with the maul up over his head and the blade of the froe set against the block for the next lick, looking up at Solon. "The dog?" he said.

It was a kind of mixed hound, with a little bird dog and some collie and maybe a considerable of almost anything else, but it would ease through the woods without no more noise than a hant and pick up a squirrel's trail on the ground and bark jest once, unless it knowed you was where you could see it, and then tiptoe that trail out jest like a man and never make another sound until it treed, and only then when it knowed you hadn't kept in sight of it. It belonged to pap and Vernon Tull together. Will Varner give it to Tull as a puppy, and pap raised it for a half interest; me and him trained it and it slept in my bed with me until it got so big maw finally run it out of the house, and for the last six months

Solon had been trying to buy it. Him and Tull had agreed on two dollars for Tull's half of it, but Solon and pap was still six dollars apart on ourn, because pap said it was worth ten dollars of anybody's money and if Tull wasn't going to collect his full half of that, he was going to collect it for him.

"So that's it," pap said. "Them things wasn't work units atall. They was dog units."

"Jest a suggestion," Solon said. "Jest a friendly offer to keep them runaway shingles from breaking up your private business for six hours tomorrow morning. You sell me your half of that trick overgrown fyce and I'll finish these shingles for you."

"Naturally including them six extra units of one dollars," pap said.

"No, no," Solon said. "I'll pay you the same two dollars for your half of that dog that me and Tull agreed on for his half of it. You meet me here tomorrow morning with the dog and you can go on back home or wherever them urgent private affairs are located, and forget about that church roof."

For about ten seconds more, pap set there with the maul up over his head, looking at Solon. Then for about three seconds he wasn't looking at Solon or at nothing else. Then he was looking at Solon again. It was jest exactly like after about two and nine-tenths seconds he found out he wasn't looking at Solon, so he looked back at him as quick as he could. "Hah," he said. Then he began to laugh. It was laughing all right, because his mouth was open and that's what it sounded like. But it never went no further back than his teeth and it never come nowhere near reaching as high up as his eyes. And he never said "Look out" this time neither. He jest shifted fast on his hips and swung the maul down, the froe done already druv through the bolt and into the ground

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while the shingle was still whirling off to slap Solon across the shin.

Then they went back at it again. Up to this time I could tell pap's licks from Solon's and Homer's, even with my back turned, not because they was louder or steadier, because Solon and Homer worked steady, too, and the froe never made no especial noise jest going into the ground, but because they was so infrequent; you would hear five or six of Solon's and Homer's little polite chipping licks before you would hear pap's froe go "chug!" and know that another shingle had went whirling off somewhere. But from now on pap's sounded jest as light and quick and polite as Solon's or Homer's either, and, if anything, even a little faster, with the shingles piling up steadier than I could stack them, almost; until now there was going to be more than a plenty of them for Tull and the others to shingle with tomorrow, right on up to noon, when we heard Armstid's farm bell, and Solon laid his froe and maul down and looked at his watch too. And I wasn't so far away neither, but by the time I caught up with pap he had untied the mule from the sapling and was already on it. And maybe Solon and Homer thought they had pap, and maybe for a minute I did, too, but I jest wish they could have seen his face then. He reached our dinner bucket down from the limb and handed it to me.

"Go on and eat," he said. "Don't wait for me. Him and his work units. If he wants to know where I went, tell him I forgot something and went home, to get it. Tell him I had to go back home to get two spoons for us to eat our dinner with. No, don't tell him that. If he hears I went somewhere to get something I needed to use, even if it's jest a tool to eat with, he will refuse to believe I jest went home, for the reason that I don't own anything there that even I would borrow." He hauled the mule around and heeled him in the flank. Then he pulled up again. "And when I come back, no matter

what I say, don't pay no attention to it. No matter what happens, don't you say nothing. Don't open your mouth a-tall, you hear?"

Then he went on, and I went back to where Solon and Homer was setting on the running board of Solon's school-bus truck, eating, and sho enough Solon said jest exactly what pap said he was going to.

"I admire his optimism, but he's mistaken. If it's something he needs that he can't use his natural hands and feet for, he's going somewhere else than jest his own house."

We had jest went back to the shingles when pap rid up and got down and tied the mule back to the sapling and come and taken up the ax and snicked the blade into the next cut.

"Well, men," he said, "I been thinking about it. I still don't think it's right, but I still ain't thought of anything to do about it. But somebody's got to make up for them two hours nobody worked this morning, and since you fellers are two to one against me, it looks like it's going to be me that makes them up. But I got work waiting at home for me tomorrow. I got corn that's crying out loud for me right now. Or maybe that's jest a lie too. Maybe the whole thing is, I don't mind admitting here in private that I been outfigured, but I be dog if I'm going to set here by myself tomorrow morning admitting it in public. Anyway, I ain't. So I'm going to trade with you, Solon. You can have the dog."

Solon looked at pap. "I don't know as I want to trade now," he said.

"I see," pap said. The ax was still stuck in the cut. He began to pump it up and down to back it out.

"Wait," Solon said. "Put that durn ax down." But pap held the ax raised for the lick, looking at Solon and waiting. "You're swapping me half a dog for a half a day's work," Solon said.

"Your half of the dog for that half a day's work you still owe on these shingles."

"And the two dollars," pap said. "That you and Tull agreed on. I sell you half the dog for two dollars, and you come back here tomorrow and finish the shingles. You give me the two dollars now, and I'll meet you here in the morning with the dog, and you can show me the receipt from Tull for his half then."

"Me and Tull have already agreed," Solon said.

"All right," pap said. "Then you can pay Tull his two dollars and bring his receipt with you without no trouble."

"Tull will be at the church tomorrow morning, pulling off them old shingles," Solon said.

"All right," pap said. "Then it won't be no trouble at all for you to get a receipt from him. You can stop at the church when you pass. Tull ain't named Grier. He won't need to be off somewhere borrowing a crowbar."

So Solon taken out his purse and paid pap the two dollars and they went back to work. And now it looked like they really was trying to finish that afternoon, not jest Solon, but even Homer, that didn't seem to be concerned in it nohow, and pap, that had already swapped a half a dog to get rid of whatever work Solon claimed would be left over. I quit trying to stay up with them; I jest stacked shingles.

Then Solon laid his froe and maul down. "Well, men," he said, "I don't know what you fellers think, but I consider this a day."

"All right," pap said. "You are the one to decide when to quit, since whatever elbow units you consider are going to be shy tomorrow will be yourn."

"That's a fact," Solon said. "And since I am giving a day and a half to the church instead of jest a day, like I started out doing, I reckon I better get on home and tend to a little of my own work." He picked up his froe and maul and ax,

and went to his truck and stood waiting for Homer to come and get in.

"I'll be here in the morning with the dog," pap said.

"Sholy," Solon said. It sounded like he had forgot about the dog, or that it wasn't no longer any importance. But he stood there again and looked hard and quiet at pap for about a second. "And a bill of sale from Tull for his half of it. As you say, it won't be no trouble a-tall to get that from him." Him and Homer got into the truck and he started the engine. You couldn't say jest what it was. It was almost like Solon was hurrying himself, so pap wouldn't have to make any excuse or pretense toward doing or not doing anything. "I have always understood the fact that lightning don't have to hit twice is one of the reasons why they named it lightning. So getting lightning-struck is a mistake that might happen to any man. The mistake I seem to made is, I never realized in time that what I was looking at was a cloud. I'll see you in the morning."

"With the dog," pap said.

"Certainly," Solon said, again like it had slipped his mind completely. "With the dog."

Then him and Homer drove off. Then pap got up.

"What?" I said. "What? You swapped him your half of Tull's dog for that half a day's work tomorrow. Now what?"

"Yes," pap said. "Only before that I had already swapped Tull a half a day's work pulling off them old shingles tomorrow, for Tull's half of that dog. Only we ain't going to wait until tomorrow. We're going to pull them shingles off tonight, and without no more racket about it than is necessary. I don't aim to have nothing on my mind tomorrow but watching Mr. Solon Work-Unit Quick trying to get a bill of sale for two dollars or ten dollars either on the other half of that dog. And we'll do it tonight. I don't want him jest to find out at sunup tomorrow that he is too late. I want him to

find out then that even when he laid down to sleep he was already too late."

So we went back home and I fed and milked while pap went down to Killebrews' to carry the froe and maul back and to borrow a crowbar. But of all places in the world and doing what under the sun with it, Old Man Killebrew had went and lost his crowbar out of a boat into forty feet of water. And pap said how he come within a inch of going to Solon's and borrowing his crowbar out of pure poetic justice, only Solon might have smelled the rat jest from the idea of the crowbar. So pap went to Armstid's and borrowed hisn and come back and we et supper and cleaned and filled the lantern while maw still tried to find out what we was up to that couldn't wait till morning.

We left her still talking, even as far as the front gate, and come on back to the church, walking this time, with the rope and crowbar and a hammer for me, and the lantern still dark. Whitfield and Snopes was unloading a ladder from Snopes' wagon when we passed the church on the way home before dark, so all we had to do was to set the ladder up against the church. Then pap clumb up onto the roof with the lantern and pulled off shingles until he could hang the lantern inside behind the decking, where it could shine out through the cracks in the planks, but you couldn't see it unless you was passing in the road, and by that time anybody would 'a' already heard us. Then I clumb up with the rope, and pap reached it through the decking and around a rafter and back and tied the ends around our waists, and we started. And we went at it. We had them old shingles jest raining down, me using the claw hammer and pap using the crowbar, working the bar under a whole patch of shingles at one time and then laying back on the bar like in one more lick or if the crowbar ever happened for one second to get a solid holt, he would tilt up that whole roof at one time like a hinged box lid.

That's exactly what he finally done. He laid back on the bar and this time it got a holt. It wasn't jest a patch of shingles, it was a whole section of decking, so that when he lunged back he snatched that whole section of roof from around the lantern like you would shuck a corn nubbin. The lantern was hanging on a nail. He never even moved the nail, he jest pulled the board off of it, so that it looked like for a whole minute I watched the lantern, and the crowbar, too, setting there in the empty air in a little mess of floating shingles, with the empty nail still sticking through the bail of the lantern, before the whole thing started down into the church. It hit the floor and bounced once. Then it hit the floor again, and this time the whole church jest blowed up into a pit of yellow jumping fire, with me and pap hanging over the edge of it on two ropes.

I don't know what become of the rope nor how we got out of it. I don't remember climbing down. Jest pap yelling behind me and pushing me about halfway down the ladder and then throwing me the rest of the way by a handful of my overalls, and then we was both on the ground, running for the water barrel. It set under the gutter spout at the side, and Armstid was there then; he had happened to go out to his lot about a hour back and seen the lantern on the church roof, and it stayed on his mind until finally he come up to see what was going on, and got there jest in time to stand yelling back and forth with pap across the water barrel. And I believe we still would have put it out. Pap turned and squatted against the barrel and got a holt of it over his shoulder and stood up with that barrel that was almost full and run around the corner and up the steps of the church and hooked his toe on the top step and come down with the barrel busting on top of him and knocking him cold out as a wedge.

So we had to drag him back first, and maw was there then, and Mrs. Armstid about the same time, and me and Armstid

run with the two fire buckets to the spring, and when we got back there was a plenty there, Whitfield, too, with more buckets, and we done what we could, but the spring was two hundred yards away and ten buckets emptied it and it taken five minutes to fill again, and so finally we all jest stood around where pap had come to again with a big cut on his head and watched it go. It was a old church, long dried out, and full of old colored-picture charts that Whitfield had accumulated for more than fifty years, that the lantern had lit right in the middle of when it finally exploded. There was a special nail where he would keep a old long nightshirt he would wear to baptize in. I would use to watch it all the time during church and Sunday school, and me and the other boys would go past the church sometimes jest to peep in at it, because to a boy of ten it wasn't jest a cloth garment or even a iron armor; it was the old strong Archangel Michael his self, that had fit and strove and conquered sin for so long that it finally had the same contempt for the human beings that returned always to sin as hogs and dogs done that the old strong archangel his self must have had.

For a long time it never burned, even after everything else inside had. We could watch it, hanging there among the fire, not like it had knowed in its time too much water to burn easy, but like it had strove and fit with the dévil and all the hosts of hell too long to burn in jest a fire that Res Grier started, trying to beat Solon Quick out of half a dog. But at last it went, too, not in a hurry still, but jest all at once, kind of roaring right on up and out against the stars and the far dark spaces. And then there wasn't nothing but jest pap, drenched and groggy-looking, on the ground, with the rest of us around him, and Whitfield like always in his boiled shirt and his black hat and pants, standing there with his hat on, too, like he had strove too long to save what hadn't ought to been created in the first place, from the damnation it didn't

even want to escape, to bother to need to take his hat off in any presence. He looked around at us from under it; we was all there now, all that belonged to that church and used it to be born and marry and die from—us and the Armstids and Tulls, and Bookwright and Quick and Snopes.

"I was wrong," Whitfield said. "I told you we would meet here tomorrow to roof a church. We'll meet here in the morning to raise one."

"Of course we got to have a church," pap said. "We're going to have one. And we're going to have it soon. But there's some of us done already give a day or so this week, at the cost of our own work. Which is right and just, and we're going to give more, and glad to. But I don't believe that the Lord ——"

Whitfield let him finish. He never moved. He jest stood there until pap finally run down of his own accord and hushed and set there on the ground mostly not looking at maw, before Whitfield opened his mouth.

"Not you," Whitfield said. "Arsonist."

"Arsonist?" pap said.

"Yes," Whitfield said. "If there is any pursuit in which you can engage without carrying flood and fire and destruction and death behind you, do it. But not one hand shall you lay to this new house until you have proved to us that you are to be trusted again with the powers and capacities of a man." He looked about at us again. "Tull and Snopes and Armstid have already promised for tomorrow. I understand that Quick had another half day he intended ——"

"I can give another day," Solon said.

"I can give the rest of the week," Homer said.

"I ain't rushed neither," Snopes said.

"That will be enough to start with, then," Whitfield said. "It's late now. Let us all go home."

He went first. He didn't look back once, at the church or

at us. He went to the old mare and clumb up slow and stiff and powerful, and 'was gone, and we went too, scattering. But I looked back at it. It was jest a shell now, with a red and fading core, and I had hated it at times and feared it at others, and I should have been glad. But there was something that even that fire hadn't even touched. Maybe that's all it was—jest indestructibility, endurability—that old man that could plan to build it back while its walls was still fire-fierce and then calmly turn his back and go away because he knowed that the men that never had nothing to give toward the new one but their work would be there at sunup tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that, too, as long as it was needed, to give that work to build it back again. So it hadn't gone a-tall; it didn't no more care for that little fire and flood than Whitfield's old baptizing gown had done. Then we was home. Maw had left so fast the lamp was still lit, and we could see pap now, still leaving a puddle where he stood, with a cut across the back of his head where the barrel had busted and the blood-streaked water soaking him to the waist.

"Get them wet clothes off," maw said.

"I don't know as I will or not," pap said. "I been publicly notified that I ain't fitten to associate with white folks, so I publicly notify them same white folks and Methodists, too, not to try to associate with me, or the devil can have the hindmost."

But maw hadn't even listened. When she come back with a pan of water and a towel and the liniment bottle, pap was already in his nightshirt.

"I don't want none of that neither," he said. "If my head wasn't worth busting, it ain't worth patching." But she never paid no mind to that neither. She washed his head off and dried it and put the bandage on and went out again, and pap went and got into bed.

"Hand me my snuff; then you get out of here and stay out too," he said.

But before I could do that maw come back. She had a glass of hot toddy, and she went to the bed and stood there with it, and pap turned his head and looked at it.

"What's that?" he said.

But maw never answered, and then he set up in bed and drawed a long, shuddering breath—we could hear it—and after a minute he put out his hand for the toddy and set there holding it and drawing his breath, and then he taken a sip of it.

"I Godfrey, if him and all of them put together think they can keep me from working on my own church like ary other man, he better be a good man to try it." He taken another sip of the toddy. Then he taken a long one. "Arsonist," he said. "Work units. Dog units. And now arsonist. I Godfrey, what a day!"

The Tall Men

THEY PASSED THE DARK bulk of the cotton gin. Then they saw the lamplit house and the other car, the doctor's coupé, just stopping at the gate, and they could hear the hound baying.

"Here we are," the old deputy marshal said.

"What's that other car?" the younger man said, the stranger, the state draft investigator.

"Doctor Schofield's," the marshal said. "Lee McCallum asked me to send him out when I telephoned we were coming."

"You mean you warned them?" the investigator said. "You telephoned ahead that I was coming out with a warrant for these two evaders? Is this how you carry out the orders of the United States Government?"

The marshal was a lean, clean old man who chewed tobacco, who had been born and lived in the county all his life.

"I understood all you wanted was to arrest these two McCallum boys and bring them back to town," he said.

"It was!" the investigator said. "And now you have warned them, given them a chance to run. Possibly put the Government to the expense of hunting them down with troops. Have you forgotten that you are under a bond yourself?"

"I ain't forgot it," the marshal said. "And ever since we

left Jefferson I been trying to tell you something for you not to forget. But I reckon it will take these McCallums to impress that on you. . . . Pull in behind the other car. We'll try to find out first just how sick whoever it is that is sick is."

The investigator drew up behind the other car and switched off and blacked out his lights. "These people," he said. Then he thought, *But this doddering, tobacco-chewing old man is one of them, too, despite the honor and pride of his office, which should have made him different.* So he didn't speak it aloud, removing the keys and getting out of the car, and then locking the car itself, rolling the windows up first, thinking, *These people who lie about and conceal the ownership of land and property in order to hold relief jobs which they have no intention of performing, standing on their constitutional rights against having to work, who jeopardize the very job itself through petty and transparent subterfuge to acquire a free mattress which they intend to attempt to sell; who would relinquish even the job, if by so doing they could receive free food and a place, any rathole, in town to sleep in; who, as farmers, make false statements to get seed loans which they will later misuse, and then react in loud vituperative outrage and astonishment when caught at it. And then, when at long last a suffering and threatened Government asks one thing of them in return, one thing simply, which is to put their names down on a selective-service list, they refuse to do it.*

The old marshal had gone on. The investigator followed, through a stout paintless gate in a picket fence, up a broad brick walk between two rows of old shabby cedars, toward the rambling and likewise paintless sprawl of the two-story house in the open hall of which the soft lamplight glowed and the lower story of which, as the investigator now perceived, was of logs.

He saw a hall full of soft lamplight beyond a stout paintless gallery running across the log front, from beneath which the same dog which they had heard, a big hound, came booming again, to stand foursquare facing them in the walk, bellowing, until a man's voice spoke to it from the house. He followed the marshal up the steps onto the gallery. Then he saw the man standing in the door, waiting for them to approach—a man of about forty-five, not tall, but blocky, with a brown, still face and horseman's hands, who looked at him once, brief and hard, and then no more, speaking to the marshal, "Howdy, Mr. Gombault. Come in."

"Howdy, Rafe," the marshal said. "Who's sick?"

"Buddy," the other said. "Slipped and caught his leg in the hammer mill this afternoon."

"Is it bad?" the marshal said.

"It looks bad to me," the other said. "That's why we sent for the doctor instead of bringing him in to town. We couldn't get the bleeding stopped."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the marshal said. "This is Mr. Pearson." Once more the investigator found the other looking at him, the brown eyes still, courteous enough in the brown face, the hand he offered hard enough, but the clasp quite limp, quite cold. The marshal was still speaking. "From Jackson. From the draft board." Then he said, and the investigator could discern no change whatever in his tone: "He's got a warrant for the boys."

The investigator could discern no change whatever anywhere. The limp hard hand merely withdrew from his, the still face now looking at the marshal. "You mean we have declared war?"

"No," the marshal said.

"That's not the question, Mr. McCallum," the investigator said. "All required of them was to register. Their numbers might not even be drawn this time; under the law of

averages, they probably would not be. But they refused—failed, anyway—to register.”

“I see,” the other said. He was not looking at the investigator. The investigator couldn’t tell certainly if he was even looking at the marshal, although he spoke to him, “You want to see Buddy? The doctor’s with him now.”

“Wait,” the investigator said. “I’m sorry about your brother’s accident, but I——” The marshal glanced back at him for a moment, his shaggy gray brows beetling, with something at once courteous yet a little impatient about the glance, so that during the instant the investigator sensed from the old marshal the same quality which had been in the other’s brief look. The investigator was a man of better than average intelligence; he was already becoming aware of something a little different here from what he had expected. But he had been in relief work in the state several years, dealing almost exclusively with country people, so he still believed he knew them. So he looked at the old marshal, thinking, *Yes. The same sort of people, despite the office, the authority and responsibility which should have changed him.* Thinking again, *These people. These people.* “I intend to take the night train back to Jackson,” he said. “My reservation is already made. Serve the warrant and we will——”

“Come along,” the old marshal said. “We are going to have plenty of time.”

So he followed—there was nothing else to do—fuming and seething, attempting in the short length of the hall to regain control of himself in order to control the situation, because he realized now that if the situation were controlled, it would devolve upon him to control it; that if their departure with their prisoners were expedited, it must be himself and not the old marshal who would expedite it. He had been right. *The doddering old officer was not only at bot-*

tom one of these people, he had apparently been corrupted anew to his old, inherent, shiftless sloth and unreliability merely by entering the house. So he followed in turn, down the hall and into a bedroom; whereupon he looked about him not only with amazement but with something very like terror. The room was a big room, with a bare unpainted floor, and besides the bed, it contained only a chair or two and one other piece of old-fashioned furniture. Yet to the investigator it seemed so filled with tremendous men cast in the same mold as the man who had met them that the very walls themselves must bulge. Yet they were not big, not tall, and it was not vitality, exuberance, because they made no sound, merely looking quietly at him where he stood in the door, with faces bearing an almost identical stamp of kinship—a thin, almost frail old man of about seventy, slightly taller than the others; a second one, white-haired, too, but otherwise identical with the man who had met them at the door; a third one about the same age as the man who had met them, but with something delicate in his face and something tragic and dark and wild in the same dark eyes; the two absolutely identical blue-eyed youths; and lastly the blue-eyed man on the bed over which the doctor, who might have been any city doctor, in his neat city suit, leaned—all of them turning to look quietly at him and the marshal as they entered. And he saw, past the doctor, the slit trousers of the man on the bed and the exposed, bloody, mangled leg, and he turned sick, stopping just inside the door under that quiet, steady regard while the marshal went up to the man who lay on the bed, smoking a cob pipe, a big, old-fashioned, wicker-covered demijohn, such as the investigator's grandfather had kept his whisky in, on the table beside him.

"Well, Buddy," the marshal said, "this is bad."

"Ah, it was my own damn fault," the man on the bed

said. "Stuart kept warning me about that frame I was using."

"That's correct," the second old one said.

Still the others said nothing. They just looked steadily and quietly at the investigator until the marshal turned slightly and said, "This is Mr. Pearson. From Jackson. He's got a warrant for the boys."

Then the man on the bed said, "What for?"

"That draft business, Buddy," the marshal said.

"We're not at war now," the man on the bed said.

"No," the marshal said. "It's that new law. They didn't register."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"It's a warrant, Buddy. Swore out."

"That means jail."

"It's a warrant," the old marshal said. Then the investigator saw that the man on the bed was watching him, puffing steadily at the pipe.

"Pour me some whisky, Jackson," he said.

"No," the doctor said. "He's had too much already."

"Pour me some whisky, Jackson," the man on the bed said. He puffed steadily at the pipe, looking at the investigator. "You come from the Government?" he said.

"Yes," the investigator said. "They should have registered. That's all required of them yet. They did not ——" His voice ceased, while the seven pairs of eyes contemplated him, and the man on the bed puffed steadily.

"We would have still been here," the man on the bed said. "We wasn't going to run." He turned his head. The two youths were standing side by side at the foot of the bed. "Anse, Lucius," he said.

To the investigator it sounded as if they answered as one, "Yes, father."

"This gentleman has come all the way from Jackson to

say the Government is ready for you. I reckon the quickest place to enlist will be Memphis. Go upstairs and pack."

The investigator started, moved forward. "Wait!" he cried.

But Jackson, the eldest, had forestalled him. He said, "Wait," also, and now they were not looking at the investigator. They were looking at the doctor.

"What about his leg?" Jackson said.

"Look at it," the doctor said. "He almost amputated it himself. It won't wait. And he can't be moved now. I'll need my nurse to help me, and some ether, provided he hasn't had too much whisky to stand the anesthetic too. One of you can drive to town in my car. I'll telephone ——"

"Ether?" the man on the bed said. "What for? You just said yourself it's pretty near off now. I could whet up one of Jackson's butcher knives and finish it myself, with another drink or two. Go on. Finish it."

"You couldn't stand any more shock," the doctor said. "This is whisky talking now."

"Shucks," the other said. "One day in France we was running through a wheat field and I saw the machine gun, coming across the wheat, and I tried to jump it like you would jump a fence rail somebody was swinging at your middle, only I never made it. And I was on the ground then, and along toward dark that begun to hurt, only about that time something went whang on the back of my helmet, like when you hit a anvil, so I never knowed nothing else until I woke up. There was a heap of us racked up along a bank outside a field dressing station, only it took a long time for the doctor to get around to all of us, and by that time it was hurting bad. This here ain't hurt none to speak of since I got a-holt of this johnny-jug. You go on and finish it. If it's help you need, Stuart and Rafe will help you. . . . Pour me a drink, Jackson."

This time the doctor raised the demijohn and examined the level of the liquor. "There's a good quart gone," he said. "If you've drunk a quart of whisky since four o'clock, I doubt if you could stand the anesthetic. Do you think you could stand it if I finished it now?"

"Yes, finish it. I've ruined it; I want to get shut of it."

The doctor looked about at the others, at the still, identical faces watching him. "If I had him in town, in the hospital, with a nurse to watch him, I'd probably wait until he got over this first shock and got the whisky out of his system. But he can't be moved now, and I can't stop the bleeding like this, and even if I had ether or a local anesthetic ——"

"Shucks," the man on the bed said. "God never made no better local nor general comfort or anesthetic neither than what's in this johnny-jug. And this ain't Jackson's leg nor Stuart's nor Rafe's nor Lee's. It's mine. I done started it; I reckon I can finish cutting it off any way I want to."

But the doctor was still looking at Jackson. "Well, Mr. McCallum?" he said. "You're the oldest."

But it was Stuart who answered. "Yes," he said. "Finish it. What do you want? Hot water, I reckon."

"Yes," the doctor said. "Some clean sheets. Have you got a big table you can move in here?"

"The kitchen table," the man who had met them at the door said. "Me and the boys ——"

"Wait," the man on the bed said. "The boys won't have time to help you." He looked at them again. "Anse, Lucius," he said.

Again it seemed to the investigator that they answered as one, "Yes, father."

"This gentleman yonder is beginning to look impatient. You better start. Come to think of it, you won't need to pack. You will have uniforms in a day or two. Take the truck. There won't be nobody to drive you to Memphis and

bring the truck back, so you can leave it at the Gayoso Feed Company until we can send for it. I'd like for you to enlist into the old Sixth Infantry, where I used to be. But I reckon that's too much to hope, and you'll just have to chance where they send you. But it likely won't matter, once you are in. The Government done right by me in my day, and it will do right by you. You just enlist wherever they want to send you, need you, and obey your sergeants and officers until you find out how to be soldiers. Obey them, but remember your name and don't take nothing from no man. You can go now."

"Wait!" the investigator cried again; again he started, moved forward into the center of the room. "I protest this! I'm sorry about Mr. McCallum's accident. I'm sorry about the whole business. But it's out of my hands and out of his hands now. This charge, failure to register according to law, has been made and the warrant issued. It cannot be evaded this way. The course of the action must be completed before any other step can be taken. They should have thought of this when these boys failed to register. If Mr. Gombault refuses to serve this warrant, I will serve it myself and take these men back to Jefferson with me to answer this charge as made. And I must warn Mr. Gombault that he will be cited for contempt!"

The old marshal turned, his shaggy eyebrows beetling again, speaking down to the investigator as if he were a child, "Ain't you found out yet that me or you neither ain't going nowhere for a while?"

"What?" the investigator cried. He looked about at the grave faces once more contemplating him with that remote and speculative regard. "Am I being threatened?" he cried.

"Ain't anybody paying any attention to you at all," the marshal said. "Now you just be quiet for a while, and you will be all right, and after a while we can go back to town."

So he stopped again and stood while the grave, contemplative faces freed him once more of that impersonal and unbearable regard, and saw the two youths approach the bed and bend down in turn and kiss their father on the mouth, and then turn as one and leave the room, passing him without even looking at him. And sitting in the lamplit hall beside the old marshal, the bedroom door closed now, he heard the truck start up and back and turn and go down the road, the sound of it dying away, ceasing, leaving the still, hot night—the Mississippi Indian summer, which had already outlasted half of November—filled with the loud last shrilling of the summer's cicadas, as though they, too, were aware of the imminent season of cold weather and of death.

"I remember old Anse," the marshal said pleasantly, chat-tily, in that tone in which an adult addresses a strange child. "He's been dead fifteen-sixteen years now. He was about sixteen when the old war broke out, and he walked all the way to Virginia to get into it. He could have enlisted and fought right here at home, but his ma was a Carter, so wouldn't nothing do him but to go all the way back to Virginia to do his fighting, even though he hadn't never seen Virginia before himself; walked all the way back to a land he hadn't never even seen before and enlisted in Stonewall Jackson's army and stayed in it all through the Valley, and right up to Chancellorsville, where them Carolina boys shot Jackson by mistake, and right on up to that morning in 'Sixty-five when Sheridan's cavalry blocked the road from Appomattox to the Valley, where they might have got away again. And he walked back to Mississippi with just about what he had carried away with him when he left, and he got married and built the first story of this house—this here log story we're in right now—and started getting them boys—Jackson and Stuart and Raphael and Lee and Buddy.

"Buddy come along late, late enough to be in the other war, in France in it. You heard him in there. He brought back two medals, an American medal and a French one, and no man knows till yet how he got them, just what he done. I don't believe he even told Jackson and Stuart and them. He hadn't hardly got back home, with them numbers on his uniform and the wound stripes and them two medals, before he had found him a girl, found her right off, and a year later them twin boys was born, the livin', spittin' image of old Anse McCallum. If old Anse had just been about seventy-five years younger, the three of them might have been thriblets. I remember them—two little critters exactly alike, and wild as spikehorn bucks, running around here day and night both with a pack of coon dogs until they got big enough to help Buddy and Stuart and Lee with the farm and the gin, and Rafe with the horses and mules, when he would breed and raise and train them and take them to Memphis to sell, right on up to three, four years back, when they went to the agricultural college for a year to learn more about whiteface cattle.

"That was after Buddy and them had quit raising cotton. I remember that too. It was when the Government first begun to interfere with how a man farmed his own land, raised his cotton. Stabilizing the price, using up the surplus, they called it, giving a man advice and help, whether he wanted it or not. You may have noticed them boys in yonder tonight; curious folks almost, you might call them. That first year, when county agents was trying to explain the new system to farmers, the agent come out here and tried to explain it to Buddy and Lee and Stuart, explaining how they would cut down the crop, but that the Government would pay farmers the difference, and so they would actually be better off than trying to farm by themselves.

" 'Why, we're much obliged,' Buddy says. 'But we don't

need no help. We'll just make the cotton like we always done; if we can't make a crop of it, that will just be our look-out and our loss, and we'll try again.'

"So they wouldn't sign no papers nor no cards nor nothing. They just went on and made the cotton like old Anse had taught them to; it was like they just couldn't believe that the Government aimed to help a man whether he wanted help or not, aimed to interfere with how much of anything he could make by hard work on his own land, making the crop and ginning it right here in their own gin, like they had always done, and hauling it to town to sell, hauling it all the way into Jefferson before they found out they couldn't sell it because, in the first place, they had made too much of it and, in the second place, they never had no card to sell what they would have been allowed. So they hauled it back. The gin wouldn't hold all of it, so they put some of it under Rafe's mule shed and they put the rest of it right here in the hall where we are setting now, where they would have to walk around it all winter and keep themselves reminded to be sho and fill out that card next time.

"Only next year they didn't fill out no papers neither. It was like they still couldn't believe it, still believed in the freedom and liberty to make or break according to a man's fitness and will to work, guaranteed by the Government that old Anse had tried to tear in two once and failed, and admitted in good faith he had failed and taken the consequences, and that had give Buddy a medal and taken care of him when he was far away from home in a strange land and hurt.

"So they made that second crop. And they couldn't sell it to nobody neither because they never had no cards. This time they built a special shed to put it under, and I remember how in that second winter Buddy come to town one day to see Lawyer Gavin Stevens. Not for legal advice how to sue

the Government or somebody into buying the cotton, even if they never had no card for it, but just to find out why. 'I was for going ahead and signing up for it,' Buddy says. 'If that's going to be the new rule. But we talked it over, and Jackson ain't no farmer, but he knowed father longer than the rest of us, and he said father would have said no, and I reckon now he would have been right.'

"So they didn't raise any more cotton; they had a plenty of it to last a while—twenty-two bales, I think it was. That was when they went into whiteface cattle, putting old Anse's cotton land into pasture, because that's what he would have wanted them to do if the only way they could raise cotton was by the Government telling them how much they could raise and how much they could sell it for, and where, and when, and then pay them for not doing the work they didn't do. Only even when they didn't raise cotton, every year the county agent's young fellow would come out to measure the pasture crops they planted so he could pay them for that, even if they never had no not-cotton to be paid for. Except that he never measured no crop on this place. 'You're welcome to look at what we are doing,' Buddy says. 'But don't draw it down on your map.'

"'But you can get money for this,' the young fellow says. 'The Government wants to pay you for planting all this.'

"'We are aiming to get money for it,' Buddy says. 'When we can't, we will try something else. But not from the Government. Give that to them that want to take it. We can make out.'

"And that's about all. Them twenty-two bales of orphan cotton are down yonder in the gin right now, because there's room for it in the gin now because they ain't using the gin no more. And them boys grew up and went off a year to the agricultural college to learn right about whiteface cattle, and then come back to the rest of them—these here

curious folks living off here to themselves, with the rest of the world all full of pretty neon lights burning night and day both, and easy, quick money scattering itself around everywhere for any man to grab a little, and every man with a shiny new automobile already wore out and throwed away and the new one delivered before the first one was even paid for, and everywhere a fine loud grabble and snatch of AAA and WPA and a dozen other three-letter reasons for a man not to work. Then this here draft comes along, and these curious folks ain't got around to signing that neither, and you come all the way up from Jackson with your paper all signed and regular, and we come out here, and after a while we can go back to town. A man gets around, don't he?"

"Yes," the investigator said. "Do you suppose we can go back to town now?"

"No," the marshal told him in that same kindly tone, "not just yet. But we can leave after a while. Of course you will miss your train. But there will be another one tomorrow."

He rose, though the investigator had heard nothing. The investigator watched him go down the hall and open the bedroom door and enter and close it behind him. The investigator sat quietly, listening to the night sounds and looking at the closed door until it opened presently and the marshal came back, carrying something in a bloody sheet, carrying it gingerly.

"Here," he said. "Hold it a minute."

"It's bloody," the investigator said.

"That's all right," the marshal said. "We can wash when we get through." So the investigator took the bundle and stood holding it while he watched the old marshal go back down the hall and on through it and vanish and return presently with a lighted lantern and a shovel. "Come along," he said. "We're pretty near through now."

The investigator followed him out of the house and across

the yard, carrying gingerly the bloody, shattered, heavy bundle in which it still seemed to him he could feel some warmth of life, the marshal striding on ahead, the lantern swinging against his leg, the shadow of his striding scissoring and enormous along the earth, his voice still coming back over his shoulder, chatty and cheerful, "Yes, sir. A man gets around and he sees a heap; a heap of folks in a heap of situations. The trouble is, we done got into the habit of confusing the situations with the folks. Take yourself, now," he said in that same kindly tone, chatty and easy; "you mean all right. You just went and got yourself all fogged up with rules and regulations. That's our trouble. We done invented ourselves so many alphabets and rules and recipes that we can't see anything else; if what we see can't be fitted to an alphabet or a rule, we are lost. We have come to be like critters doctor folks might have created in laboratories, that have learned how to slip off their bones and guts and still live, still be kept alive indefinite and forever maybe even without even knowing the bones and the guts are gone. We have slipped our backbone; we have about decided a man don't need a backbone any more; to have one is old-fashioned. But the groove where the backbone used to be is still there, and the backbone has been kept alive, too, and someday we're going to slip back onto it. I don't know just when nor just how much of a wrench it will take to teach us, but someday."

They had left the yard now. They were mounting a slope; ahead of them the investigator could see another clump of cedars, a small clump, somehow shaggily formal against the starred sky. The marshal entered it and stopped and set the lantern down and, following with the bundle, the investigator saw a small rectangle of earth enclosed by a low brick coping. Then he saw the two graves, or the headstones—two plain granite slabs set upright in the earth.

"Old Anse and Mrs. Anse," the marshal said. "Buddy's wife wanted to be buried with her folks. I reckon she would have been right lonesome up here with just McCallums. Now, let's see." He stood for a moment, his chin in his hand; to the investigator he looked exactly like an old lady trying to decide where to set out a shrub. "They was to run from left to right, beginning with Jackson. But after the boys was born, Jackson and Stuart was to come up here by their pa and ma, so Buddy could move up some and make room. So he will be about here." He moved the lantern nearer and took up the shovel. Then he saw the investigator still holding the bundle. "Set it down," he said. "I got to dig first."

"I'll hold it," the investigator said.

"Nonsense, put it down," the marshal said. "Buddy won't mind."

So the investigator put the bundle down on the brick coping and the marshal began to dig, skillfully and rapidly, still talking in that cheerful, interminable voice, "Yes, sir. We done forgot about folks. Life has done got cheap, and life ain't cheap. Life's a pretty durn valuable thing. I don't mean just getting along from one WPA relief check to the next one, but honor and pride and discipline that make a man worth preserving, make him of any value. That's what we got to learn again. Maybe it takes trouble, bad trouble, to teach it back to us; maybe it was the walking to Virginia because that's where his ma come from, and losing a war and then walking back, that taught it to old Anse. Anyway, he seems to learned it, and to learned it good enough to bequeath it to his boys. Did you notice how all Buddy had to do was to tell them boys of his it was time to go, because the Government had sent them word? And how they told him good-by? Growned men kissing one another without hiding and without shame. Maybe that's what I am trying to say. . . . There." he said. "That's big enough."

He moved quickly, easily; before the investigator could stir, he had lifted the bundle into the narrow trench and was covering it, covering it as rapidly as he had dug, smoothing the earth over it with the shovel. Then he stood up and raised the lantern—a tall, lean old man, breathing easily and lightly.

“I reckon we can go back to town now,” he said.

A Bear Hunt

RATLIFF IS TELLING THIS. He is a sewing-machine agent; time was when he traveled about our county in a light, strong buckboard drawn by a sturdy, wiry, mismatched team of horses; now he uses a model T Ford, which also carries his demonstrator machine in a tin box on the rear, shaped like a dog kennel and painted to resemble a house.

Ratliff may be seen anywhere without surprise—the only man present at the bazaars and sewing bees of farmers' wives; moving among both men and women at all-day singings at country churches, and singing, too, in a pleasant barytone. He was even at this bear hunt of which he speaks, at the annual hunting camp of Major de Spain in the river bottom twenty miles from town, even though there was no one there to whom he might possibly have sold a machine, since Mrs. de Spain doubtless already owned one, unless she had given it to one of her married daughters, and the other man—the man called Lucius Provine—with whom he became involved, to the violent detriment of his face and other members, could not have bought one for his wife even if he would, without Ratliff sold it to him on indefinite credit.

Provine is also a native of the county. But he is forty now and most of his teeth are gone, and it is years now since he and his dead brother and another dead and forgotten contemporary named Jack Bonds were known as the Provine

gang and terrorized our quiet town after the unimaginative fashion of wild youth by letting off pistols on the square late Saturday nights or galloping their horses down scurrying and screaming lanes of churchgoing ladies on Sunday morning. Younger citizens of the town do not know him at all save as a tall, apparently strong and healthy man who loafs in a brooding, saturnine fashion wherever he will be allowed, never exactly accepted by any group, and who makes no effort whatever to support his wife and three children.

There are other men among us now whose families are in want; men who, perhaps, would not work anyway, but who now, since the last few years, cannot find work. These all attain and hold to a certain respectability by acting as agents for the manufacturers of minor articles like soap and men's toilet accessories and kitchen objects, being seen constantly about the square and the streets carrying small black sample cases. One day, to our surprise, Provine also appeared with such a case, though within less than a week the town officers discovered that it contained whisky in pint bottles. Major de Spain extricated him somehow, as it was Major de Spain who supported his family by eking out the money which Mrs. Provine earned by sewing and such—perhaps as a Roman gesture of salute and farewell to the bright figure which Provine had been before time whipped him.

For there are older men who remember the Butch—he has even lost somewhere in his shabby past the lusty dare-deviltry of the nickname—Provine of twenty years ago; that youth without humor, yet with some driving, inarticulate zest for breathing which has long since burned out of him, who performed in a fine frenzy, which was, perhaps, mostly alcohol, certain outrageous and spontaneous deeds, one of which was the Negro-picnic business. The picnic was at a Negro church a few miles from town. In the midst of it, the two Provines and Jack Bonds, returning from a dance in the

country, rode up with drawn pistols and freshly lit cigars; and taking the Negro men one by one, held the burning cigar ends to the popular celluloid collars of the day, leaving each victim's neck ringed with an abrupt and faint and painless ring of carbon. This is he of whom Ratliff is talking.

But there is one thing more which must be told here in order to set the stage for Ratliff. Five miles farther down the river from Major de Spain's camp, and in an even wilder part of the river's jungle of cane and gum and pin oak, there is an Indian mound. Aboriginal, it rises profoundly and darkly enigmatic, the only elevation of any kind in the wild, flat jungle of river bottom. Even to some of us—children though we were, yet we were descended of literate, town-bred people—it possessed inferences of secret and violent blood, of savage and sudden destruction, as though the yells and hatchets which we associated with Indians through the hidden and secret dime novels which we passed among ourselves were but trivial and momentary manifestations of what dark power still dwelled or lurked there, sinister, a little sardonic, like a dark and nameless beast lightly and lazily slumbering with bloody jaws—this, perhaps, due to the fact that a remnant of a once powerful clan of the Chickasaw tribe still lived beside it under Government protection. They now had American names and they lived as the sparse white people who surrounded them in turn lived.

Yet we never saw them, since they never came to town, having their own settlement and store. When we grew older we realized that they were no wilder or more illiterate than the white people, and that probably their greatest deviation from the norm—and this, in our country, no especial deviation—was the fact that they were a little better than suspect to manufacture moonshine whisky back in the swamps. Yet to us, as children, they were a little fabulous, their swamp-hidden lives inextricable from the life of the dark mound,

which some of us had never seen, yet of which we had all heard, as though they had been set by the dark powers to be guardians of it.

As I said, some of us had never seen the mound, yet all of us had heard of it, talked of it as boys will. It was as much a part of our lives and background as the land itself, as the lost Civil War and Sherman's march, or that there were Negroes among us living in economic competition who bore our family names; only more immediate, more potential and alive. When I was fifteen, a companion and I, on a dare, went into the mound one day just at sunset. We saw some of those Indians for the first time; we got directions from them and reached the top of the mound just as the sun set. We had camping equipment with us, but we made no fire. We didn't even make down our beds. We just sat side by side on that mound until it became light enough to find our way back to the road. We didn't talk. When we looked at each other in the gray dawn, our faces were gray, too, quiet, very grave. When we reached town again, we didn't talk either. We just parted and went home and went to bed. That's what we thought, felt, about the mound. We were children, it is true, yet we were descendants of people who read books and who were—or should have been—beyond superstition and impervious to mindless fear.

Now Ratliff tells about Lucius Provine and his hiccup.

When I got back to town, the first fellow I met says, "What happened to your face, Ratliff? Was De Spain using you in place of his bear hounds?"

"No, boys," I says. "Hit was a cattymount."

"What was you trying to do to hit, Ratliff?" a fellow says.

"Boys," I says, "be dog if I know."

And that was the truth. Hit was a good while after they had done hauled Luke Provine offen me that I found that

out. Because I never knowed who Old Man Ash was, no more than Luke did. I just knowed that he was Major's nigger, a-helping around camp. All I knowed, when the whole thing started, was what I thought I was aiming to do—to maybe help Luke sho enough, or maybe at the outside to just have a little fun with him without hurting him, or even maybe to do Major a little favor by getting Luke outen camp for a while. And then hyer hit is about midnight and that durn fellow comes swurging outen 'the woods wild as a skeered deer, and runs in where they are setting at the poker game, and I says, "Well, you ought to be satisfied. You done run clean out from under them." And he stopped dead still and give me a kind of glare of wild astonishment; he didn't even know that they had quit; and then he swurged all over me like a barn falling down.

Hit sho stopped that poker game. Hit taken three or four of them to drag him offen me, with Major turned in his chair with a set of threes in his hand, a-hammering on the table and hollering cusses. Only a right smart of the helping they done was stepping on my face and hands and feet. Hit was like a fahr—the fellows with the water hose done the most part of the damage.

"What the tarnation hell does this mean?" Major hollers, with three or four fellows holding Luke, and him crying like a baby.

"He set them on me!" Luke says. "He was the one sent me up there, and I'm a-going to kill him!"

"Set who on you?" Major says.

"Them Indians!" Luke says, crying. Then he tried to get at me again, flinging them fellows holding his arms around like they was rag dolls, until Major pure cussed him quiet. He's a man yet. Don't let hit fool you none because he claims he ain't strong enough to work. Maybe hit's because he ain't never wore his strength down toting around one of them

little black satchels full of pink galluses and shaving soap. Then Major asked me what hit was all about, and I told him how I had just been trying to help Luke get shed of them hiccups.

Be dog if I didn't feel right sorry for him. I happened to be passing out that way, and so I just thought I would drop in on them and see what luck they was having, and I druv up about sundown, and the first fellow I see was Luke. I wasn't surprised, since this here would be the biggest present gathering of men in the county, let alone the free eating and whisky, so I says, "Well, this is a surprise." And he says:

"Hic-uh! Hic-ow! Hic-oh! Hic—oh, God!" He had done already had them since nine o'clock the night before; he had been teching the jug ever' time Major offered him one and ever' time he could get to hit when Old Man Ash wasn't looking; and two days before Major had killed a bear, and I reckon Luke had already et more possum-rich bear pork—let alone the venison they had, with maybe a few coons and squirrels throwed in for seasoning—than he could have hauled off in a waggin. So here he was, going three times to the minute, like one of these here clock bombs; only hit was bear meat and whisky instead of dynamite, and so he couldn't explode and put himself outen his misery.

They told me how he had done already kept ever'body awake most of the night before, and how Major got up mad anyway, and went off with his gun and Ash to handle them two bear hounds, and Luke following—outen pure misery, I reckon, since he hadn't slept no more than nobody else—walking along behind Major, saying, "Hic-ah! Hic-ow! Hic-oh! Hic—oh, Lord!" until Major turns on him and says:

"Get to hell over yonder with them shotgun fellows on the deer stands. How do you expect me to walk up on a bear or even hear the dogs when they strike? I might as well be riding a motorcycle."

So Luke went on back to where the deer standers was along the log-line levee. I reckon he never so much went away as he kind of died away in the distance like that ere motorcycle Major mentioned. He never tried to be quiet. I reckon he knowed hit wouldn't be no use. He never tried to keep to the open, neither. I reckon he thought that any fool would know from his sound that he wasn't no deer. No. I reckon he was so mizzable by then that he hoped somebody would shoot him. But nobody never, and he come to the first stand, where Uncle Ike McCaslin was, and set down on a log behind Uncle Ike with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, going, "Hic-uh! Hic-uh! Hic-uh! Hic-uh!" until Uncle Ike turns and says:

"Confound you, boy; get away from here. Do you reckon any varmint in the world is going to walk up to a hay baler? Go drink some water."

"I done already done that," Luke says, without moving. "I been drinking water since nine o'clock last night. I done already drunk so much water that if I was to fall down I would gush like a artesian well."

"Well, go away anyhow," Uncle Ike says. "Get away from here."

So Luke gets up and kind of staggers away again, kind of dying away again like he was run by one of these hyer one-cylinder gasoline engines, only a durn sight more often and regular. He went on down the levee to where the next stand was, and they druv him way from there, and he went on toward the next one. I reckon he was still hoping that somebody would take pity on him and shoot him, because now he kind of seemed to give up. Now, when he come to the "oh, God" part of hit, they said you could hyear him clean back to camp. They said he would echo back from the canebrake across the river like one of these hyer loud-speakers down in a well. They said that even the dogs on the trail quit baying,

and so they all come up and made him come back to camp. That's where he was when I come in. And Old Man Ash was there, too, where him and Major had done come in so Major could take a nap, and neither me nor Luke noticing him except as just another nigger around.

That was hit. Neither one of us knowed or even thought about him. I be dog if hit don't look like sometimes that when a fellow sets out to play a joke, hit ain't another fellow he's playing that joke on; hit's a kind of big power laying still somewhere in the dark that he sets out to prank with without knowing hit, and hit all depends on whether that ere power is in the notion to take a joke or not, whether or not hit blows up right in his face like this one did in mine. Because I says, "You done had them since nine o'clock yesterday? That's nigh twenty-four hours. Seems like to me you'd 'a' done something to try to stop them." And him looking at me like he couldn't make up his mind whether to jump up and bite my head off or just to try and bite hisn off, saying "Hic-uh! Hic-uh!" slow and regular. Then he says,

"I don't want to get shed of them. I like them. But if you had them, I would get shed of them for you. You want to know how?"

"How?" I says.

"I'd just tear your head off. Then you wouldn't have nothing to hiccup with. They wouldn't worry you then. I'd be glad to do hit for you."

"Sho now," I says, looking at him setting there on the kitchen steps—hit was after supper, but he hadn't et none, being as his throat had done turned into a one-way street on him, you might say—going "Hic-uh! Hic-oh! Hic-oh! Hic-uh!" because I reckon Major had done told him what would happen to him if he taken to hollering again. I never meant no harm. Besides, they had done already told me how he had kept everybody awake all night the night before and had

done skeered all the game outen that part of the bottom, and besides, the walk might help him to pass his own time. So I says, "I believe I know how you might get shed of them. But, of course, if you don't want to get shed of them ——"

And he says, "I just wish somebody would tell me how. I'd pay ten dollars just to set here for one minute without saying 'hic' ——" Well, that set him off sho enough. Hit was like up to that time his insides had been satisfied with going "hic-uh" steady, but quiet, but now, when he reminded himself, hit was like he had done opened a cut-out, because right away he begun hollering, "Hic—oh, God!" like when them fellows on the deer stands had made him come back to camp, and I heard Major's feet coming bup-bup-bup across the floor. Even his feet sounded mad, and I says quick, "Sh-h-h-h! You don't want to get Major mad again, now."

So he quieted some, setting there on the kitchen steps, with Old Man Ash and the other niggers moving around inside the kitchen, and he says, "I will try anything you can sugest. I done tried ever'thing I knowed and ever'thing anybody else told me to. I done held my breath and drunk water until I feel just like one of these hyer big automobile tahrs they use to advertize with, and I hung by my knees offen that limb yonder for fifteen minutes and drunk a pint bottle full of water upside down, and somebody said to swallow a buckshot and I done that. And still I got them. What do you know that I can do?"

"Well," I says, "I don't know what you would do. But if hit was me that had them, I'd go up to the mound and get old John Basket to cure me."

Then he set right still, and then he turned slow and looked at me; I be dog if for a minute he didn't even hiccup. "John Basket?" he says.

"Sho," I says. "Them Indians knows all sorts of dodges that white doctors ain't hyeard about vet. He'd be glad to do

that much for a white man, too, them pore aboriginees would, because the white folks have been so good to them—not only letting them keep that ere hump of dirt that don't nobody want noways, but letting them use names like *ourn* and selling them flour and sugar and farm tools at not no more than a fair profit above what they would cost a white man. I hyear tell how pretty soon they are even going to start letting them come to town once a week. Old Basket would be glad to cure them hiccups for you."

"John Basket," he says; "them Indians," he says, hiccuping slow and quiet and steady. Then he says right sudden, "I be dog if I will!" Then I be dog if hit didn't sound like he was crying. He jumped up and stood there cussing, sounding like he was crying. "Hit ain't a man hyer has got any mercy on me, white or black. Hyer I done suffered and suffered more than twenty-four hours without food or sleep, and not a sonabitch of them has any mercy or pity on me!"

"Well, I was trying to," I says. "Hit ain't me that's got them. I just thought, seeing as how you had done seemed to got to the place where couldn't no white man help you. But hit ain't no law making you go up there and get shed of them." So I made like I was going away. I went back around the corner of the kitchen and watched him set down on the steps again, going "Hic-uh! Hic-uh!" slow and quiet again; and then I seen, through the kitchen window, Old Man Ash standing just inside the kitchen door, right still, with his head bent like he was listening. But still I never suspected nothing. Not even did I suspect nothing when; after a while, I watched Luke get up again, sudden but quiet, and stand for a minute looking at the window where the poker game and the folks was, and then look off into the dark towards the road that went down the bottom. Then he went into the house, quiet, and come out a minute later with a lighted lantrun and a shotgun. I don't know whose gun hit was and I don't reckon

he did, nor cared neither. He just come out kind of quiet and determined, and went on down the road. I could see the lantrun, but I could hyear him a long time after the lantrun had done disappeared. I had come back around the kitchen then and I was listening to him dying away down the bottom, when old Ash says behind me:

"He gwine up dar?"

"Up where?" I says.

"Up to de mound," he says.

"Why, I be dog if I know," I says. "The last time I talked to him he never sounded like he was fixing to go nowhere. Maybe he just decided to take a walk. Hit might do him some good; make him sleep tonight and help him get up a appetite for breakfast maybe. What do you think?"

But Ash never said nothing. He just went on back into the kitchen. And still I never suspected nothing. How could I? I hadn't never even seen Jefferson in them days. I hadn't never even seen a pair of shoes, let alone two stores in a row or a arc light.

So I went on in where the poker game was, and I says, "Well, gentlemen, I reckon we might get some sleep to-night." And I told them what had happened, because more than like he would stay up there until daylight rather than walk them five miles back in the dark, because maybe them Indians wouldn't mind a little thing like a fellow with hiccups, like white folks would. And I be dog if Major didn't rear up about hit.

"Dammit, Ratliff," he says, "you ought not to done that."

"Why, I just suested hit to him, Major, for a joke," I says. "I just told him about how old Basket was a kind of doctor. I never expected him to take hit serious. Maybe he ain't even going up there. Maybe's he's just went out after a coon."

But most of them felt about hit like I did. "Let him go," Mr. Fraser says. "I hope he walks around all night. Damn if,

I slept a wink for him all night long. . . . Deal the cards Uncle Ike."

"Can't stop him now, noways," Uncle Ike says, dealing the cards. "And maybe John Basket can do something for his hiccups. Durn young fool, eating and drinking himself to where he can't talk nor swallow neither. He set behind me on a log this morning, sounding just like a hay baler. I thought once I'd have to shoot him to get rid of him. . . . Queen bets a quarter, gentlemen."

So I set there watching them, thinking now and then about that durn fellow with his shotgun and his lantrun stumbling and blundering along through the woods, walking five miles in the dark to get shed of his hiccups, with the varmints all watching him and wondering just what kind of a hunt this was and just what kind of a two-leg varmint hit was that made a noise like that, and about them Indians up at the mound when he would come walking in, and I would have to laugh until Major says, "What in hell are you mumbling and giggling at?"

"Nothing," I says. "I was just thinking about a fellow I know."

"And damn if you hadn't ought to be out there with him," Major says. Then he decided hit was about drink time and he begun to holler for Ash. Finally I went to the door and hol-lered for Ash towards the kitchen, but hit was another one of the niggers that answered. When he come in with the demijohn and fixings, Major looks up and says "Where's Ash?"

"He done gone," the nigger says.

"Gone?" Major says. "Gone where?"

"He say he gwine up to'ds de mound," the nigger says. And still I never knowed, never suspected. I just thought to myself, "That old nigger has turned powerful tender-hearted all of a sudden, being skeered for Luke Provine to walk

around by himself in the dark. Or maybe Ash likes to listen to them hiccups," I thought to myself.

"Up to the mound?" Major says. "By dad, if he comes back here full of John Basket's bust-skull whisky I'll skin him alive."

"He ain't say what he gwine fer," the nigger says. "All he tell me when he left, he gwine up to'ds de mound and he be back by daylight."

"He better be," Major says. "He better be sober too."

So we set there and they went on playing and me watching them like a durn fool, not suspecting nothing, just thinking how hit was a shame that that durned old nigger would have to come in and spoil Luke's trip, and hit come along towards eleven o'clock and they begun to talk about going to bed, being as they was all going out on stand tomorrow, when we hyeard the sound. Hit sounded like a drove of wild horses coming up that road, and we hadn't no more than turned towards the door, a-asking one another what in tarnation hit could be, with Major just saying, "What in the name of ——" when hit come across the porch like a harrycane and down the hall, and the door busted open and there Luke was. He never had no gun and lantrun then, and his clothes was nigh tore clean offen him, and his face looked wild as ere a man in the Jackson a-sylum. But the main thing I noticed was that he wasn't hiccuping now. And this time, too, he was nigh crying.

"They was fixing to kill me!" he says. "They was going to burn me to death! They had done tried me and tied me onto the pile of wood, and one of them was coming with the fahr when I managed to bust loose and run!"

"Who was?" Major says. "What in the tarnation hell are you talking about?"

"Them Indians!" Luke says. "They was fixing to ——"

"What?" Major hollers. "Damn to blue blazes, what?"

And that was where I had to put my foot in hit. He hadn't never seen me until then. "At least they cured your hiccups," I says.

Hit was then that he stopped right still. He hadn't never even seen me, but he seen me now. He stopped right still and looked at me with that ere wild face that looked like hit had just escaped from Jackson and had ought to be took back there quick.

"What?" he says.

"Anyway, you done run out from under them hiccups," I says.

Well, sir, he stood there for a full minute. His eyes had done gone blank, and he stood there with his head cocked a little, listening to his own insides. I reckon hit was the first time he had took time to find out that they was gone. He stood there right still for a full minute while that ere kind of shocked astonishment come onto his face. Then he jumped on me. I was still setting in my chair, and I be dog if for a minute I didn't think the roof had done fell in.

Well, they got him offen me at last and got him quieted down, and then they washed me off and give me a drink, and I felt better. But even with that drink I never felt so good but what I felt hit was my duty to my honor to call him outen the back yard, as the fellow says. No, sir. I know when I done made a mistake and guessed wrong; Major de Spain wasn't the only man that caught a bear on that hunt; no, sir. I be dog, if it had been daylight, I'd a hitched up my Ford and taken out of there. But hit was midnight, and besides, that nigger, Ash, was on my mind then. I had just begun to suspect that hit was more to this business than met the nekkid eye. And hit wasn't no good time then to go back to the kitchen then and ask him about hit, because Luke was using the kitchen. Major had give him a drink, too, and he was back there, making up for them two days he hadn't et, talk-

ing a right smart about what he aimed to do to such and such a sonabitch that would try to play his durn jokes on him, not mentioning no names; but mostly laying himself in a new set of hiccups, though I ain't going back to see.

So I waited until daylight, until I hheard the niggers stirring around in the kitchen; then I went back there. And there was old Ash, looking like he always did, oiling Major's boots and setting them behind the stove and then taking up Major's rifle and beginning to load the magazine. He just looked once at my face when I come in, and went on shoving ca'tridges into the gun.

"So you went up to the mound last night," I says. He looked up at me again, quick, and then down again. But he never said nothing, looking like a durned old frizzle-headed ape. "You must know some of them folks up there," I says.

"I knows some of um," he says, shoving ca'tridges into the gun.

"You know old John Basket?" I says.

"I knows some of um," he says, not looking at me.

"Did you see him last night?" I says. He never said nothing at all. So then I changed my tone, like a fellow has to do to get anything outen a nigger. "Look here," I says. "Look at me." He looked at me. "Just what did you do up there last night?"

"Who, me?" he says.

"Come on," I says. "Hit's all over now. Mr. Provine has done got over his hiccups and we done both forgot about anything that might have happened when he got back last night. You never went up there just for fun last night. Or maybe hit was something you told them up there, told old man Basket. Was that hit?" He had done quit looking at me, but he never stopped shoving ca'tridges into that gun. He looked quick to both sides. "Come on," I says. "Do you want to tell me what happened up there, or do you want me to

mention to Mr. Provine that you was mixed up in hit some way?" He never stopped loading the rifle and he never looked at me, but I be dog if I couldn't almost see his mind working. "Come on," I says. "Just what was you doing up there last night?"

Then he told me. I reckon he knowed hit wasn't no use to try to hide hit then; that if I never told Luke, I could still tell Major. "I jest dodged him and got dar first en told um he was a new revenue agent coming up dar tonight, but dat he warn't much en dat all dey had to do was to give um a good skeer en likely he would go away. En dey did en he did."

"Well!" I says. "Well! I always thought I was pretty good at joking folks," I says, "but I take a back seat for you. What happened?" I says. "Did you see hit?"

"Never much happened," he says. "Dey jest went down de road a piece en atter a while hyer he come a-hickin' en a-blumpin' up de road wid de lant'un en de gun. They took de lant'un en de gun away frum him en took him up pon topper de mound en talked de Injun language at him fer a while. Den dey piled up some wood en fixed him on hit so he could git loose in a minute, en den one of dem come up de hill wid de fire, en he done de rest."

"Well!" I says. "Well, I'll be eternally durned!" And then all on a sudden hit struck me. I had done turned and was going out when hit struck me, and I stopped and I says, "There's one more thing I want to know. Why did you do hit?"

Now he set there on the wood box, rubbing the gun with his hand, not looking at me again. "I wuz jest helping you kyo him of dem hiccups."

"Come on," I says. "That wasn't your reason. What was hit? Remember, I got a right smart I can tell Mr. Provine and Major both now. I don't know what Major will do, but I know what Mr. Provine will do if I was to tell him."

And he set there, rubbing that ere rifle with his hand. He was kind of looking down, like he was thinking. Not like he was trying to decide whether to tell me or not, but like he was remembering something from a long time back. And that's exactly what he was doing, because he says:

"I ain't skeered for him to know. One time dey was a picnic. Hit was a long time back, nigh twenty years ago. He was a young man den, en in de middle of de picnic, him en he brother en nudder white man—I fergit he name—dey rid up wid dey pistols out en cotch us niggers one at a time en burned our collars off. Hit was him dat burnt mine."

"And you waited all this time and went to all this trouble, just to get even with him?" I says.

"Hit warn't dat," he says, rubbing the rifle with his hand. "Hit wuz de collar. Back in dem days a top nigger hand made two dollars a week. I paid fo' bits fer dat collar. Hit wuz blue, wid a red picture of de race betwixt de Natchez en de Robert E. Lee running around hit. He burnt hit up. I makes ten dollars a week now. En I jest wish I knowed where I could buy another collar like dat un fer half of hit. I wish I did."

Two Soldiers

ME AND PETE would go down to Old Man Killegrew's and listen to his radio. We would wait until after supper, after dark, and we would stand outside Old Man Killegrew's parlor window, and we could hear it because Old Man Killegrew's wife was deaf, and so he run the radio as loud as it would run, and so me and Pete could hear it plain as Old Man Killegrew's wife could, I reckon, even standing outside with the window closed.

And that night I said, "What? Japanese? What's a pearl harbor?" and Pete said, "Hush."

And so we stood there, it was cold, listening to the fellow in the radio talking, only I couldn't make no heads nor tails neither out of it. Then the fellow said that would be all for a while, and me and Pete walked back up the road to home, and Pete told me what it was. Because he was nigh twenty and he had done finished the Consolidated last June and he knowed a heap: about them Japanese dropping bombs on Pearl Harbor and that Pearl Harbor was across the water.

"Across what water?" I said. "Across that Government reservoy up at Oxford?"

"Naw," Pete said. "Across the big water. The Pacific Ocean."

We went home. Maw and pap was already asleep, and me

and Pete laid in the bed, and I still couldn't understand where it was, and Pete told me again—the Pacific Ocean.

"What's the matter with you?" Pete said. "You're going on nine years old. You been in school now ever since September. Ain't you learned nothing yet?"

"I reckon we ain't got as fer as the Pacific Ocean yet," I said.

We was still sowing the vetch then that ought to been all finished by the fifteenth of November, because pap was still behind, just like he had been ever since me and Pete had knowed him. And we had firewood to git in, too, but every night me and Pete would go down to Old Man Killegrew's and stand outside his parlor window in the cold and listen to his radio; then we would come back home and lay in the bed and Pete would tell me what it was. That is, he would tell me for a while. Then he wouldn't tell me. It was like he didn't want to talk about it no more. He would tell me to shut up because he wanted to go to sleep, but he never wanted to go to sleep.

He would lay there, a heap stiller than if he was asleep, and it would be something, I could feel it coming out of him, like he was mad at me even, only I knowed he wasn't thinking about me, or like he was worried about something, and it wasn't that neither, because he never had nothing to worry about. He never got behind like pap, let alone stayed behind. Pap give him ten acres when he graduated from the Consolidated, and me and Pete both reckoned pap was durn glad to get shut of at least ten acres, less to have to worry with himself; and Pete had them ten acres all sowed to vetch and busted out and bedded for the winter, and so it wasn't that. But it was something. And still we would go down to Old Man Killegrew's every night and listen to his radio, and they was at it in the Philippines now, but General MacArthur was holding um. Then we would come back home and lay in

the bed, and Pete wouldn't tell me nothing or talk at all. He would just lay there still as a ambush and when I would touch him, his side or his leg would feel hard and still as iron, until after a while I would go to sleep.

Then one night—it was the first time he had said nothing to me except to jump on me about not chopping enough wood at the wood tree where we was cutting—he said, “I got to go.”

“Go where?” I said.

“To that war,” Pete said.

“Before we even finish gettin’ in the firewood?”

“Firewood, hell,” Pete said.

“All right,” I said. “When we going to start?”

But he wasn't even listening. He laid there, hard and still as iron in the dark. “I got to go,” he said. “I jest ain't going to put up with no folks treating the Unity States that way.”

“Yes,” I said. “Firewood or no firewood, I reckon we got to go.”

This time he heard me. He laid still again, but it was a different kind of still.

“You?” he said. “To a war?”

“You'll whup the big uns and I'll whup the little uns,” I said.

Then he told me I couldn't go. At first I thought he just never wanted me tagging after him, like he wouldn't leave me go with him when he went sparking them girls of Tull's. Then he told me the Army wouldn't leave me go because I was too little, and then I knowed he really meant it and that I couldn't go nohow noways. And somehow I hadn't believed until then that he was going himself, but now I knowed he was and that he wasn't going to leave me go with him a-tall.

“I'll chop the wood and tote the water for you-all then!” I said. “You got to have wood and water!”

Anyway, he was listening to me now. He wasn't like iron now.

He turned onto his side and put his hand on my chest because it was me that was laying straight and hard on my back now.

"No," he said. "You got to stay here and help pap."

"Help him what?" I said. "He ain't never caught up no-how. He can't get no further behind. He can sholy take care of this little shirttail of a farm while me and you are whupping them Japanese. I got to go too. If you got to go, then so have I."

"No," Pete said. "Hush now. Hush." And he meant it, and I knowed he did. Only I made sho from his own mouth. I quit.

"So I just can't go then," I said.

"No," Pete said. "You just can't go. You're too little, in the first place, and in the second place ——"

"All right," I said. "Then shut up and leave me go to sleep."

So he hushed then and laid back. And I laid there like I was already asleep, and pretty soon he was asleep and I knowed it was the wanting to go to the war that had worried him and kept him awake, and now that he had decided to go, he wasn't worried any more.

The next morning he told maw and pap. Maw was all right. She cried.

"No," she said, crying, "I don't want him to go. I would rather go myself in his place, if I could. I don't want to save the country. Them Japanese could take it and keep it, so long as they left me and my family and my children alone. But I remember my brother Marsh in that other war. He had to go to that one when he wasn't but nineteen, and our mother couldn't understand it then any more than I can now. But she told Marsh if he had to go, he had to go. And so, if Pete's

got to go to this one, he's got to go to it. Jest don't ask me to understand why."

But pap was the one. He was the feller. "To the war?" he said. "Why, I just don't see a bit of use in that. You ain't old enough for the draft, and the country ain't being invaded. Our President in Washington, D. C., is watching the conditions and he will notify us. Besides, in that other war your ma just mentioned, I was drafted and sent clean to Texas and was held there nigh eight months until they finally quit fighting. It seems to me that that, along with your Uncle Marsh who received a actual wound on the battlefields of France, is enough for me and mine to have to do to protect the country, at least in my lifetime. Besides, what'll I do for help on the farm with you gone? It seems to me I'll get mighty far behind."

"You been behind as long as I can remember," Pete said. "Anyway, I'm going. I got to."

"Of course he's got to go," I said. "Them Japanese ——"

"You hush your mouth!" maw said, crying. "Nobody's talking to you! Go and get me a armful of wood! That's what you can do!"

So I got the wood. And all the next day, while me and Pete and pap was getting in as much wood as we could in that time because Pete said how pap's idea of plenty of wood was one more stick laying against the wall that maw ain't put on the fire yet, Maw was getting Pete ready to go. She washed and mended his clothes and cooked him a shoe box of vittles. And that night me and Pete laid in the bed and listened to her packing his grip and crying, until after a while Pete got up in his nightshirt and went back there, and I could hear them talking, until at last maw said, "You got to go, and so I want you to go. But I don't understand it, and I won't never, and so don't expect me to." And Pete come back and got into the bed again and laid again still and

hard as iron on his back, and then he said, and he wasn't talking to me, he wasn't talking to nobody: "I got to go. I just got to."

"Sho you got to," I said. "Them Japanese ——" He turned over hard, he kind of surged over onto his side, looking at me in the dark.

"Anyway, you're all right," he said. "I expected to have more trouble with you than with all the rest of them put together."

"I reckon I can't help it neither," I said. "But maybe it will run a few years longer and I can get there. Maybe someday I will jest walk in on you."

"I hope not," Pete said. "Folks don't go to wars for fun. A man don't leave his maw crying just for fun."

"Then why are you going?" I said.

"I got to," he said. "I just got to. Now you go on to sleep. I got to ketch that early bus in the morning."

"All right," I said. "I hear tell Memphis is a big place. How will you find where the Army's at?"

"I'll ask somebody where to go to join it," Pete said. "Go on to sleep now."

"Is that what you'll ask for? Where to join the Army?" I said.

"Yes," Pete said. He turned onto his back again. "Shut up and go to sleep."

We went to sleep. The next morning we et breakfast by lamplight because the bus would pass at six o'clock. Maw wasn't crying now. She jest looked grim and busy, putting breakfast on the table while we et it. Then she finished packing Pete's grip, except he never wanted to take no grip to the war, but maw said decent folks never went nowhere, not even to a war, without a change of clothes and something to tote them in. She put in the shoe box of fried chicken and biscuits and she put the Bible in, too, and then it was time to

go. We didn't know until then that maw wasn't going to the bus. She jest brought Pete's cap and overcoat, and still she didn't cry no more, she jest stood with her hands on Pete's shoulders and she didn't move, but somehow, and just holding Pete's shoulders, she looked as hard and fierce as when Pete had turned toward me in the bed last night and tole me that anyway I was all right.

"They could take the country and keep the country, so long as they never bothered me and mine," she said. Then she said, "Don't never forget who you are. You ain't rich and the rest of the world outside of Frenchman's Bend never heard of you. But your blood is good as any blood anywhere, and don't you never forget it."

Then she kissed him, and then we was out of the house, with pap toting Pete's grip whether Pete wanted him to or not. There wasn't no dawn even yet, not even after we had stood on the highway by the mailbox, a while. Then we seen the lights of the bus coming and I was watching the bus until it come up and Pete flagged it, and then, sho enough, there was daylight—it had started while I wasn't watching. And now me and Pete expected pap to say something else foolish, like he done before, about how Uncle Marsh getting wounded in France and that trip to Texas pap taken in 1918 ought to be enough to save the Unity States in 1942, but he never. He done all right too. He jest said, "Good-by, son. Always remember what your ma told you and write her whenever you find the time." Then he shaken Pete's hand, and Pete looked at me a minute and put his hand on my head and rubbed my head durn nigh hard enough to wring my neck off and jumped into the bus, and the feller wound the door shut and the bus began to hum; then it was moving, humming and grinding and whining louder and louder; it was going fast, with two little red lights behind it that never seemed to get no littler, but just seemed to be running to-

gether until pretty soon they would touch and jest be one light. But they never did, and then the bus was gone, and even like it was, I could have pretty nigh busted out crying, nigh to nine years old and all.

Me and pap went back to the house. All that day we worked at the wood tree, and so I never had no good chance until about middle of the afternoon. Then I taken my slingshot and I would have liked to took all my bird eggs, too, because Pete had give me his collection and he help me with mine, and he would like to git the box out and look at them as good as I would, even if he was nigh twenty years old. But the box was too big to tote a long ways and have to worry with, so I just taken the shikepoke egg, because it was the best un, and wropped it up good into a matchbox and hid it and the slingshot under the corner of the barn. Then we et supper and went to bed, and I thought then how if I would 'a' had to stayed in that room and that bed like that even for one more night, I jest couldn't 'a' stood it. Then I could hear pap snoring, but I never heard no sound from maw, whether she was asleep or not, and I don't reckon she was. So I taken my shoes and drapped them out the window, and then I clumb out like I used to watch Pete do when he was still jest seventeen and pap held that he was too young yet to be tom-cattin' around at night, and wouldn't leave him out, and I put on my shoes and went to the barn and got the slingshot and the shikepoke egg and went to the highway.

It wasn't cold, it was jest durn confounded dark, and that highway stretched on in front of me like, without nobody using it, it had stretched out half again as fer just like a man does when he lays down, so that for a time it looked like full sun was going to ketch me before I had finished them twenty-two miles to Jefferson. But it didn't. Daybreak was jest starting when I walked up the hill into town. I could smell breakfast cooking in the cabins and I wished I had thought to

brought me a cold biscuit, but that was too late now. And Pete had told me Memphis was a piece beyond Jefferson, but I never knowed it was no eighty miles. So I stood there on that empty square, with daylight coming and coming and the street lights still burning and that Law looking down at me, and me still eighty miles from Memphis, and it had took me all night to walk jest twenty-two miles, and so, by the time I got to Memphis at that rate, Pete would 'a' done already started for Pearl Harbor.

"Where do you come from?" the Law said.

And I told him again. "I got to get to Memphis. My brother's there."

"You mean you ain't got any folks around here?" the Law said. "Nobody but that brother? What are you doing way off down here and your brother in Memphis?"

And I told him again, "I got to get to Memphis. I ain't got no time to waste talking about it and I ain't got time to walk it. I got to git there today."

"Come on here," the Law said.

We went down another street. And there was the bus, just like when Pete got into it yestiddy morning, except there wasn't no lights on it now and it was empty. There was a regular bus dee-po like a railroad dee-po, with a ticket counter and a feller behind it, and the Law said, "Set down over there," and I set down on the bench, and the Law said, "I want to use your telephone," and he talked in the telephone a minute and put it down and said to the feller behind the ticket counter, "Keep your eye on him. I'll be back as soon as Mrs. Habersham can arrange to get herself up and dressed." He went out. I got up and went to the ticket counter.

"I want to go to Memphis," I said.

"You bet," the feller said. "You set down on the bench now. Mr. Foote will be back in a minute."

"I don't know no Mr. Foote," I said. "I want to ride that bus to Memphis."

"You got some money?" he said. "It'll cost you seventy-two cents."

I taken out the matchbox and unwrapped the shikepoke egg. "I'll swap you this for a ticket to Memphis," I said.

"What's that?" he said.

"It's a shikepoke egg," I said. "You never seen one before. It's worth a dollar. I'll take seventy-two cents fer it."

"No," he said, "the fellers that own that bus insist on a cash basis. If I started swapping tickets for bird eggs and livestock and such, they would fire me. You go and set down on the bench now, like Mr. Foote ——"

I started for the door, but he caught me, he put one hand on the ticket counter and jumped over it and caught up with me and reached his hand out to ketch my shirt. I whupped out my pocketknife and snapped it open.

"You put a hand on me and I'll cut it off," I said.

I tried to dodge him and run at the door, but he could move quicker than any grown man I ever see, quick as Pete almost. He cut me off and stood with his back against the door and one foot raised a little, and there wasn't no other way to get out. "Get back on that bench and stay there," he said.

And there wasn't no other way out. And he stood there with his back against the door. So I went back to the bench. And then it seemed like to me that dee-po was full of folks. There was that Law again, and there was two ladies in fur coats and their faces already painted. But they still looked like they had got up in a hurry and they still never liked it, a old one and a young one, looking down at me.

"He hasn't got a overcoat!" the old one said. "How in the world did he ever get down here by himself?"

"I ask you," the Law said. "I couldn't get nothing out of

him except his brother is in Memphis and he wants to get back up there."

"That's right," I said. "I got to git to Memphis today."

"Of course you must," the old one said. "Are you sure you can find your brother when you get to Memphis?"

"I reckon I can," I said. "I ain't got but one and I have knowed him all my life. I reckon I will know him again when I see him."

The old one looked at me. "Somehow he doesn't look like he lives in Memphis," she said.

"He probably don't," the Law said. "You can't tell though. He might live anywhere, overhalls or not. This day and time they get scattered overnight from he—— hope to breakfast; boys and girls, too, almost before they can walk good. He might have been in Missouri or Texas either yes-tiddy, for all we know. But he don't seem to have any doubt his brother is in Memphis. All I know to do is send him up there and leave him look."

"Yes," the old one said.

The young one set down on the bench by me and opened a hand satchel and taken out a artermatic writing pen and some papers.

"Now, honey," the old one said, "we're going to see that you find your brother, but we must have a case history for our files first. We want to know your name and your brother's name and where you were born and when your parents died."

"I don't need no case history neither," I said. "All I want is to get to Memphis. I got to get there today."

"You see?" the Law said. He said it almost like he enjoyed it. "That's what I told you."

"You're lucky, at that, Mrs. Habersham," the bus feller said. "I don't think he's got a gun on him, but he can open that knife da—— I mean, fast enough to suit any man."

But the old one just stood there looking at me.

"Well," she said. "Well. I really don't know what to do."

"I do," the bus feller said. "I'm going to give him a ticket out of my own pocket, as a measure of protecting the company against riot and bloodshed. And when Mr. Foote tells the city board about it, it will be a civic matter and they will not only reimburse me, they will give me a medal too. Hey, Mr. Foote?"

But never nobody paid him no mind. The old one still stood looking down at me. She said "Well," again. Then she taken a dollar from her purse and give it to the bus feller. "I suppose he will travel on a child's ticket, won't he?"

"Wellum," the bus feller said, "I just don't know what the regulations would be. Likely I will be fired for not crating him and marking the crate Poison. But I'll risk it."

Then they were gone. Then the Law come back with a sandwich and give it to me.

"You're sure you can find that brother?" he said.

"I ain't yet convinced why not," I said. "If I don't see Pete first, he'll see me. He knows me too."

Then the Law went out for good, too, and I et the sandwich. Then more folks come in and bought tickets, and then the bus feller said it was time to go, and I got into the bus just like Pete done, and we was gone.

I seen all the towns. I seen all of them. When the bus got to going good, I found out I was jest about wore out for sleep. But there was too much I hadn't never saw before. We run out of Jefferson and run past fields and woods, then we would run into another town and out of that un and past fields and woods again, and then into another town with stores and gins and water tanks, and we run along by the railroad for a spell and I seen the signal arm move, and then I seen the train and then some more towns, and I was jest about plumb wore out for sleep, but I couldn't resk it. Then

Memphis begun. It seemed like, to me, it went on for miles. We would pass a patch of stores and I would think that was sholy it and the bus would even stop. But it wouldn't be Memphis yet and we would go on again past water tanks and smokestacks on top of the mills, and if they was gins and sawmills, I never knowed there was that many and I never seen any that big, and where they got enough cotton and logs to run um I don't know.

Then I see Memphis. I knowed I was right this time. It was standing up into the air. It looked like about a dozen whole towns bigger than Jefferson was set up on one edge in a field, standing up into the air higher than ara hill in all Yoknapatawpha County. Then we was in it, with the bus stopping ever' few feet, it seemed like to me, and cars rushing past on both sides of it and the street crowded with folks from ever'where in town that day, until I didn't see how there could 'a' been nobody left in Mis'sippi a-tall to even sell me a bus ticket, let alone write out no case histories. Then the bus stopped. It was another bus dee-po, a heap bigger than the one in Jefferson. And I said, "All right. Where do folks join the Army?"

"What?" the bus feller said.

And I said it again, "Where do folks join the Army?"

"Oh," he said. Then he told me how to get there. I was afraid at first I wouldn't ketch on how to do in a town big as Memphis. But I caught on all right. I never had to ask but twice more. Then I was there, and I was durn glad to git out of all them rushing cars and shoving' folks and all that racket for a spell, and I thought, It won't be long now, and I thought how if there was any kind of a crowd there that had done already joined the Army, too, Pete would likely see me before I seen him. And so I walked into the room. And Pete wasn't there.

He wasn't even there. There was a soldier with a big arrer-

head on his sleeve, writing, and two fellers standing in front of him, and there was some more folks there, I reckon. It seems to me I remember some more folks there.

I went to the table where the soldier was writing, and I said, "Where's Pete?" and he looked up and I said, "My brother. Pete Grier. Where is he?"

"What?" the soldier said. "Who?"

And I told him again. "He joined the Army yestiddy. He's going to Pearl Harbor. So am I. I want to ketch him. Where you all got him?" Now they were all looking at me, but I never paid them no mind. "Come on," I said. "Where is he?"

The soldier had quit writing. He had both hands spraddled out on the table. "Oh," he said. "You're going, too, hah?"

"Yes," I said. "They got to have wood and water. I can chop it and tote it. Come on. Where's Pete?"

The soldier stood up. "Who let you in here?" he said. "Go on. Beat it."

"Durn that," I said. "You tell me where Pete ——"

I be dog if he couldn't move faster than the bus feller even. He never come over the table, he come around it, he was on me almost before I knowed it, so that I jest had time to jump back and whup out my pocket-knife and snap it open and hit one lick, and he hollered and jumped back and grabbed one hand with the other and stood there cussing and hollering.

One of the other fellers grabbed me from behind, and I hit at him with the knife, but I couldn't reach him.

Then both of the fellers had me from behind, and then another soldier come out of a door at the back. He had on a belt with a britching strop over one shoulder.

"What the hell is this?" he said.

"That little son cut me with a knife!" the first soldier hollered. When he said that I tried to get at him again,

but both them fellers was holding me, two against one, and the soldier with the backing strop said, "Here, here. Put your knife up, feller. None of us are armed. A man don't knife-fight folks that are barehanded." I could begin to hear him then. He sounded jest like Pete talked to me. "Let him go," he said. They let me go. "Now what's all the trouble about?" And I told him. "I see," he said. "And you come up to see if he was all right before he left."

"No," I said. "I came to ——"

But he had already turned to where the first soldier was wropping a handkerchief around his hand.

"Have you got him?" he said. The first soldier went back to the table and looked at some papers.

"Here he is," he said. "He enlisted yestiddy. He's in a detachment leaving this morning for Little Rock." He had a watch stropped on his arm. He looked at it. "The train leaves in about fifty minutes. If I know country boys, they're probably all down there at the station right now."

"Get him up here," the one with the backing strop said. "Phone the station. Tell the porter to get him a cab. And you come with me," he said.

It was another office behind that un, with jest a table and some chairs. We set there while the soldier smoked, and it wasn't long; I knowed Pete's feet soon as I heard them. Then the first soldier opened the door and Pete come in. He never had no soldier clothes on. He looked jest like he did when he got on the bus yestiddy morning, except it seemed to me like it was at least a week, so much had happened, and I had done had to do so much traveling. He come in and there he was, looking at me like he hadn't never left home, except that here we was in Memphis, on the way to Pearl Harbor.

"What in durnation are you doing here?" he said.

And I told him, "You got to have wood and water to cook with. I can chop it and tote it for you-all."

"No," Pete said. "You're going back home."

"No, Pete," I said. "I got to go too. I got to. It hurts my heart, Pete."

"No," Pete said. He looked at the soldier. "I jest don't know what could have happened to him, lieutenant," he said. "He never drewed a knife on anybody before in his life." He looked at me. "What did you do it for?"

"I don't know," I said. "I jest had to. I jest had to git here. I jest had to find you."

"Well, don't you never do it again, you hear?" Pete said. "You put that knife in your pocket and you keep it there. If I ever again hear of you drawing it on anybody, I'm coming back from wherever I am at and whup the fire out of you. You hear me?"

"I would pure cut a throat if it would bring you back to stay," I said. "Pete," I said. "Pete."

"No," Pete said. Now his voice wasn't hard and quick no more, it was almost quiet, and I knowed now I wouldn't never change him. "You must go home. You must look after maw, and I am depending on you to look after my ten acres. I want you to go back home. Today. Do you hear?"

"I hear," I said.

"Can he get back home by himself?" the soldier said.

"He come up here by himself," Pete said.

"I can get back, I reckon," I said. "I don't live in but one place. I don't reckon it's moved."

Pete taken a dollar out of his pocket and give it to me. "That'll buy your bus ticket right to our mailbox," he said. "I want you to mind the lieutenant. He'll send you to the bus. And you go back home and you take care of maw and look after my ten acres and keep that durn knife in your pocket. You hear me?"

"Yes, Pete," I said.

"All right," Pete said. "Now I got to go." He put his hand

on my head again. But this time he never wrung my neck. He just laid his hand on my head a minute. And then I be dog if he didn't lean down and kiss me, and I heard his feet and then the door, and I never looked up and that was all, me setting there, rubbing the place where Pete kissed me and the soldier throwed back in his chair, looking out the window and coughing. He reached into his pocket and handed something to me without looking around. It was a piece of chewing gum.

"Much obliged," I said. "Well, I reckon I might as well start back. I got a right fer piece to go."

"Wait," the soldier said. Then he telephoned again and I said again I better start back, and he said again, "Wait. Remember what Pete told you."

So we waited, and then another lady come in, old, too, in a fur coat, too, but she smelled all right, she never had no artermatic writing pen nor no case history neither. She come in and the soldier got up, and she looked around quick until she saw me, and come and put her hand on my shoulder light and quick and easy as maw herself might 'a' done it.

"Come on," she said. "Let's go home to dinner."

"Nome," I said. "I got to ketch the bus to Jefferson."

"I know. There's plenty of time. We'll go home and eat dinner first."

She had a car. And now we was right down in the middle of all them other cars. We was almost under the busses, and all them crowds of people on the street close enough to where I could have talked to them if I had knowed who they was. After a while she stopped the car. "Here we are," she said, and I looked at it, and if all that was her house, she sho had a big family. But all of it wasn't. We crossed a hall with trees growing in it and went into a little room without nothing in it but a nigger dressed up in a uniform a heap shinier than them soldiers had, and the nigger shut the door,

and then I hollered, "Look out!" and grabbed, but it was all right; that whole little room jest went right on up and stopped and the door opened and we was in another hall, and the lady unlocked a door and we went in, and there was another soldier, a old feller, with a britching strop, too, and a silver-colored bird on each shoulder.

"Here we are," the lady said. "This is Colonel McKellogg. Now, what would you like for dinner?"

"I reckon I'll jest have some ham and eggs and coffee," I said.

She had done started to pick up the telephone. She stopped. "Coffee?" she said. "When did you start drinking coffee?"

"I don't know," I said. "I reckon it was before I could remember."

"You're about eight, aren't you?" she said.

"Nome," I said. "I'm eight and ten months. Going on eleven months."

She telephoned then. Then we set there and I told them how Pete had jest left that morning for Pearl Harbor and I had aimed to go with him, but I would have to go back home to take care of maw and look after Pete's ten acres, and she said how they had a little boy about my size, too, in a school in the East. Then a nigger, another one, in a short kind of shirttail coat, rolled a kind of wheelbarreg in. It had my ham and eggs and a glass of milk and a piece of pie, too, and I thought I was hungry. But when I taken the first bite I found out I couldn't swallow it, and I got up quick.

"I got to go," I said.

"Wait," she said.

"I got to go," I said.

"Just a minute," she said. "I've already telephoned for the car. It won't be but a minute now. Can't you drink the milk even? Or maybe some of your coffee?"

"Nome," I said. "I ain't hungry. I'll eat when I git home." Then the telephone rung. She never even answered it.

"There," she said. "There's the car." And we went back down in that 'ere little moving room with the dressed-up nigger. This time it was a big car with a soldier driving it. I got into the front with him. She give the soldier a dollar. "He might get hungry," she said. "Try to find a decent place for him."

"O.K., Mrs. McKellogg," the soldier said.

Then we was gone again. And now I could see Memphis good, bright in the sunshine, while we was swinging around it. And first thing I knowed, we was back on the same highway the bus run on this morning—the patches of stores and them big gins and sawmills, and Memphis running on for miles, it seemed like to me, before it begun to give out. Then we was running again between the fields and woods, running fast now, and except for that soldier, it was like I hadn't never been to Memphis a-tall. We was going fast now. At this rate, before I knowed it we would be home again, and I thought about me riding up to Frenchman's Bend in this big car with a soldier running it, and all of a sudden I begun to cry. I never knowed I was fixing to, and I couldn't stop it. I set there by that soldier, crying. We was going fast.

Shall Not Perish

WHEN THE MESSAGE came about Pete, Father and I had already gone to the field. Mother got it out of the mailbox after we left and brought it down to the fence, and she already knew beforehand what it was because she didn't even have on her sunbonnet, so she must have been watching from the kitchen window when the carrier drove up. And I already knew what was in it too. Because she didn't speak. She just stood at the fence with the little pale envelope that didn't even need a stamp on it in her hand, and it was me that hollered at Father, from further away across the field than he was, so that he reached the fence first where Mother waited even though I was already running. "I know what it is," Mother said. "But can't open it. Open it."

"No it ain't!" I hollered, running. "No it ain't!" Then I was hollering, "No, Pete! No, Pete!" Then I was hollering, "God damn them Japs! God damn them Japs!" and then I was the one Father had to grab and hold, trying to hold me, having to wrastle with me like I was another man instead of just nine.

And that was all. One day there was Pearl Harbor. And the next week Pete went to Memphis, to join the army and go there and help them; and one morning Mother stood at the field fence with a little scrap of paper not even big enough to start a fire with, that didn't even need a stamp on the enve-

lope, saying, *A ship was. Now it is not. Your son was one of them.* And we allowed ourselves one day to grieve, and that was all. Because it was April, the hardest middle push of planting time, and there was the land, the seventy acres which were our bread and fire and keep, which had outlasted the Griers before us because they had done right by it, and had outlasted Pete because while he was here he had done his part to help and would outlast Mother and Father and me if we did ours.

Then it happened again. Maybe we had forgotten that it could and was going to, again and again, to people who loved sons and brothers as we loved Pete, until the day finally came when there would be an end to it. After that day when we saw Pete's name and picture in the Memphis paper, Father would bring one home with him each time he went to town. And we would see the pictures and names of soldiers and sailors from other counties and towns in Mississippi and Arkansas and Tennessee, but there wasn't another from ours, and so after a while it did look like Pete was going to be all.

Then it happened again. It was late July, a Friday. Father had gone to town early on Homer Bookwright's cattletruck and now it was sundown. I had just come up from the field with the light sweep and I had just finished stalling the mule and come out of the barn when Homer's truck stopped at the mailbox and Father got down and came up the lane, with a sack of flour balanced on his shoulder and a package under his arm and the folded newspaper in his hand. And I took one look at the folded paper and then no more. Because I knew it too, even if he always did have one when he came back from town. Because it was bound to happen sooner or later; it would not be just us out of all Yoknapatawpha County who had loved enough to have sole right to grief. So I just met him and took part of the load and turned beside him, and we entered the kitchen together where our cold supper waited

on the table and Mother sat in the last of sunset in the open door, her hand and arm strong and steady on the dasher of the churn.

When the message came about Pete, Father never touched her. He didn't touch her now. He just lowered the flour onto the table and went to the chair and held out the folded paper. "It's Major de Spain's boy," he said. "In town. The av-aytor. That was home last fall in his officer uniform. He run his airplane into a Japanese battleship and blowed it up. So they knowed where he was at." And Mother didn't stop the churn for a minute either, because even I could tell that the butter had almost come. Then she got up and went to the sink and washed her hands and came back and sat down again.

"Read'it," she said.

So Father and I found out that Mother not only knew all the time it was going to happen again, but that she already knew what she was going to do when it did, not only this time but the next one too, and the one after that and the one after that, until the day finally came when all the grieving about the earth, the rich and the poor too, whether they lived with ten nigger servants in the fine big painted houses in town or whether they lived on and by seventy acres of not extra good land like us or whether all they owned was the right to sweat today for what they would eat tonight, could say, *At least this there was some point to why we grieved.*

We fed and milked and came back and ate the cold supper, and I built a fire in the stove and Mother put on the kettle and whatever else would heat enough water for two, and I fetched in the washtub from the back porch, and while Mother washed the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen, Father and I sat on the front steps. This was about the time of day that Pete and I would walk the two miles down to Old Man Killegrew's house last December, to listen to the radio tell about Pearl Harbor and Manila. But more than Pearl Harbor

and Manila has happened since then, and Pete don't make one to listen to it. Nor do I: it's like, since nobody can tell us exactly where he was when he stopped being *is*, instead of just becoming *was* at some single spot on the earth where the people who loved him could weight him down with a stone, Pete still *is* everywhere about the earth, one among all the fighters forever, *was* or *is* either. So Mother and Father and I don't need a little wooden box to catch the voices of them that saw the courage and the sacrifice. Then Mother called me back to the kitchen. The water smoked a little in the washtub, beside the soap dish and my clean nightshirt and the towel Mother made out of our worn-out cotton sacks, and I bathe and empty the tub and leave it ready for her, and we lie down.

Then morning, and we rose. Mother was up first, as always. My clean white Sunday shirt and pants were waiting, along with the shoes and stockings I hadn't even seen since frost was out of the ground. But in yesterday's overalls still I carried the shoes back to the kitchen where Mother stood in yesterday's dress at the stove where not only our breakfast was cooking but Father's dinner too, and set the shoes beside her Sunday ones against the wall and went to the barn, and Father and I fed and milked and came back and sat down and ate while Mother moved back and forth between the table and the stove till we were done, and she herself sat down. Then I got out the blacking-box, until Father came and took it away from me—the polish and rag and brush and the four shoes in succession. “De Spain is rich,” he said. “With a monkey nigger in a white coat to hold the jar up each time he wants to spit. You shine all shoes like you aimed yourself to wear them: just the parts that you can see yourself by looking down.”

Then we dressed. I put on my Sunday shirt and the pants so stiff with starch that they would stand alone, and carried

my stockings back to the kitchen just as Mother entered, carrying hers, and dressed too, even her hat, and took my stockings from me and put them with hers on the table beside the shined shoes, and lifted the satchel down from the cupboard shelf. It was still in the cardboard box it came in, with the colored label of the San Francisco drugstore where Pete bought it—a round, square-ended, water-proof satchel with a handle for carrying, so that as soon as Pete saw it in the store he must have known too that it had been almost exactly made for exactly what we would use it for, with a zipper opening that Mother had never seen before nor Father either. That is, we had all three been in the drugstore and the ten-cent-store in Jefferson but I was the only one who had been curious enough to find out how one worked, even though even I never dreamed we would ever own one. So it was me that zipped it open, with a pipe and a can of tobacco in it for Father and a hunting cap with a carbide headlight for me and for Mother the satchel itself, and she zipped it shut and then open and then Father tried it, running the slide up and down the little clicking track until Mother made him stop before he wore it out; and she put the satchel, still open, back into the box and I fetched in from the barn the empty quart bottle of cattle-dip and she scalded the bottle and cork and put them and the clean folded towel into the satchel and set the box onto the cupboard shelf, the zipper still open because when we came to need it we would have to open it first and so we would save that much wear on the zipper too. She took the satchel from the box and the bottle from the satchel and filled the bottle with clean water and corked it and put it back into the satchel with the clean towel and put our shoes and stockings in and zipped the satchel shut, and we walked to the road and stood in the bright hot morning beside the mailbox until the bus came up and stopped.

It was the school bus, the one I rode back and forth to

Frenchman's Bend to school in last winter, and that Pete rode in every morning and evening until he graduated, but going in the opposite direction now, in to Jefferson, and only on Saturday, seen for a long time down the long straight stretch of Valley road while other people waiting beside other mail-boxes got into it. Then it was our turn. Mother handed the two quarters to Solon Quick, who built it and owned it and drove it, and we got in too and it went on, and soon there was no more room for the ones that stood beside the mailboxes and signalled and then it went fast, twenty miles then ten then five then one, and up the last hill to where the concrete streets began, and we got out and sat on the curb and Mother opened the satchel and took our shoes and the bottle of water and the towel and we washed our feet and put on our shoes and stockings and Mother put the bottle and towel back and shut the bag.

And we walked beside the iron picket fence long enough to front a cotton patch; we turned into the yard which was bigger than farms I had seen and followed the gravel drive wider and smoother than roads in Frenchman's Bend, on to the house that to me anyway looked bigger than the courthouse, and mounted the steps between the stone columns and crossed the portico that would have held our whole house, galleries and all, and knocked at the door. And then it never mattered whether our shoes were shined at all or not: the whites of the monkey nigger's eyes for just a second when he opened the door for us, the white of his coat for just a second at the end of the hall before it was gone too, his feet not making any more noise than a cat's leaving us to find the right door by ourselves, if we could. And we did—the rich man's parlor that any woman in Frenchman's Bend and I reckon in the rest of the county too could have described to the inch but which not even the men who would come to Major de Spain after bank-hours or on Sunday to

ask to have a note extended, had ever seen, with a light hanging in the middle of the ceiling the size of our whole washtub full of chopped-up ice and a gold-colored harp that would have blocked our barn door and a mirror that a man on a mule could have seen himself and the mule both in, and a table shaped like a coffin in the middle of the floor with the Confederate flag spread over it and the photograph of Major de Spain's son and the open box with the medal in it and a big blue automatic pistol weighting down the flag, and Major de Spain standing at the end of the table with his hat on until after a while he seemed to hear and recognize the name which Mother spoke;—not a real major but just called that because his father had been a real one in the old Confederate war, but a banker powerful in money and politics both, that Father said had made governors and senators too in Mississippi;—an old man, too old you would have said to have had a son just twenty-three; too old anyway to have had that look on his face.

"Ha," he said. "I remember now. You too were advised that your son poured out his blood on the altar of unpreparedness and inefficiency. What do you want?"

"Nothing," Mother said. She didn't even pause at the door. She went on toward the table. "We had nothing to bring you. And I don't think I see anything here we would want to take away."

"You're wrong," he said. "You have a son left. Take what they have been advising to me: go back home and pray. Not for the dead one: for the one they have so far left you, that something somewhere, somehow will save him!" She wasn't even looking at him. She never had looked at him again. She just went on across that barn-sized room exactly as I have watched her set mine and Father's lunch pail into the fence corner when there wasn't time to stop the plows to eat, and turn back toward the house.

"I can tell you something simpler than that," she said. "Weep." Then she reached the table. But it was only her body that stopped, her hand going out so smooth and quick that his hand only caught her wrist, the two hands locked together on the big blue pistol, between the photograph and the little hunk of iron medal on its colored ribbon, against that old flag that a heap of people I knew had never seen and a heap more of them wouldn't recognize if they did, and over all of it the old man's voice that ought not to have sounded like that either.

"For his country! He had no country: this one I too repudiate. His country and mine both was ravaged and polluted and destroyed eighty years ago, before even I was born. His forefathers fought and died for it then, even though what they fought and lost for was a dream. He didn't even have a dream. He died for an illusion. In the interests of usury, by the folly and rapacity of politicians, for the glory and aggrandisement of organized labor!"

"Yes," Mother said. "Weep."

"The fear of elective servants for their incumbencies! The subservience of misled workingmen for the demagogues who misled them! Shame? Grief? How can poltroonery and rapacity and voluntary thralldom know shame or grief?"

"All men are capable of shame," Mother said. "Just as all men are capable of courage and honor and sacrifice. And grief too. It will take time, but they will learn it. It will take more grief than yours and mine, and there will be more. But it will be enough."

"When? When all the young men are dead? What will there be left then worth the saving?"

"I know," Mother said. "I know. Our Pete was too young too to have to die." Then I realized that their hands were no longer locked, that he was erect again and that the pistol was hanging slack in Mother's hand against her side, and for

a minute I thought she was going to unzip the satchel and take the towel out of it. But she just laid the pistol back on the table and stepped up to him and took the handkerchief from his breast pocket and put it into his hand and stepped back. "That's right," she said. "Weep. Not for him: for us, the old, who don't know why. What is your Negro's name?"

But he didn't answer. He didn't even raise the handkerchief to his face. He just stood there holding it, like he hadn't discovered yet that it was in his hand, or perhaps even what it was Mother had put there. "For us, the old," he said. "You believe. You have had three months to learn again, to find out why; mine happened yesterday. Tell me."

"I don't know," Mother said. "Maybe women are not supposed to know why their sons must die in battle; maybe all they are supposed to do is just to grieve for them. But my son knew why. And my brother went to the war when I was a girl, and our mother didn't know why either, but he did. And my grandfather was in that old one there too, and I reckon his mother didn't know why either, but I reckon he did. And my son knew why he had to go to this one, and he knew I knew he did even though I didn't, just as he knew that this child here and I both knew he would not come back. But he knew why, even if I didn't, couldn't, never can. So it must be all right, even if I couldn't understand it. Because there is nothing in him that I or his father didn't put there. What is your Negro's name?"

He called the name then. And the nigger wasn't so far away after all, though when he entered Major de Spain had already turned so that his back was toward the door. He didn't look around. He just pointed toward the table with the hand Mother had put the handkerchief into, and the nigger went to the table without looking at anybody and without making any more noise on the floor than a cat and he didn't stop at all; it looked to me like he had already

turned and started back before he even reached the table: one flick of the black hand and the white sleeve and the pistol vanished without me even seeing him touch it and when he passed me again going out, I couldn't see what he had done with it. So Mother had to speak twice before I knew she was talking to me.

"Come," she said.

"Wait," said Major de Spain. He had turned again, facing us. "What you and his father gave him. You must know what that was."

"I know it came a long way," Mother said. "So it must have been strong to have lasted through all of us. It must have been all right for him to be willing to die for it after that long time and coming that far. Come," she said again.

"Wait," he said. "Wait. Where did you come from?"

Mother stopped. "I told you: Frenchman's Bend."

"I know. How? By wagon? You have no car."

"Oh," Mother said. "We came in Mr. Quick's bus. He comes in every Saturday."

"And waits until night to go back. I'll send you back in my car." He called the nigger's name again. But Mother stopped him. "Thank you," she said. "We have already paid Mr. Quick. He owes us the ride back home."

There was an old lady born and raised in Jefferson who died rich somewhere in the North and left some money to the town to build a museum with. It was a house like a church, built for nothing else except to hold the pictures she picked out to put in it—pictures from all over the United States, painted by people who loved what they had seen or where they had been born or lived enough to want to paint pictures of it so that other people could see it too; pictures of men and women and children, and the houses and streets and cities and the woods and fields and streams where they worked or lived or pleased, so that all the people who

wanted to, people like us from Frenchman's Bend or from littler places even than Frenchman's Bend in our county or beyond our state too, could come without charge into the cool and the quiet and look without let at the pictures of men and women and children who were the same people that we were even if their houses and barns were different and their fields worked different, with different things growing in them. So it was already late when we left the museum, and later still when we got back to where the bus waited, and later still more before we got started, although at least we could get into the bus and take our shoes and stockings back off. Because Mrs. Quick hadn't come yet and so Solon had to wait for her, not because she was his wife but because he made her pay a quarter out of her egg-money to ride to town and back on Saturday, and he wouldn't go off and leave anybody who had paid him. And so, even though the bus ran fast again, when the road finally straightened out into the long Valley stretch, there was only the last sunset speaking out across the sky, stretching all the way across America from the Pacific ocean, touching all the places that the men and women in the museum whose names we didn't even know had loved enough to paint pictures of them, like a big soft fading wheel.

And I remembered how Father used to always prove any point he wanted to make to Pete and me, by Grandfather. It didn't matter whether it was something he thought we ought to have done and hadn't, or something he would have stopped us from doing if he had just known about it in time. "Now, take your Grandpap," he would say. I could remember him too: Father's grandfather even, old, so old you just wouldn't believe it, so old that it would seem to me he must have gone clean back to the old fathers in Genesis and Exodus that talked face to face with God, and Grandpap outlived them all except him. It seemed to me he

must have been too old even to have actually fought in the old Confederate war, although that was about all he talked about, not only when we thought that maybe he was awake but even when we knew he must be asleep, until after a while we had to admit that we never knew which one he really was. He would sit in his chair under the mulberry in the yard or on the sunny end of the front gallery or in his corner by the hearth; he would start up out of the chair and we still wouldn't know which one he was, whether he never had been asleep or whether he hadn't ever waked even when he jumped up, hollering, "Look out! Look out! Here they come!" He wouldn't even always holler the same name; they wouldn't even always be on the same side or even soldiers: Forrest, or Morgan, or Abe Lincoln, or Van Dorn, or Grant or Colonel Sartoris himself, whose people still lived in our county, or Mrs. Rosa Millard, Colonel Sartoris's mother-in-law who stood off the Yankees and carpetbaggers too for the whole four years of the war until Colonel Sartoris could get back home. Pete thought it was just funny. Father and I were ashamed. We didn't know what Mother thought nor even what it was, until the afternoon at the picture show.

It was a continued picture, a Western; it seemed to me that it had been running every Saturday afternoon for years. Pete and Father and I would go in to town every Saturday to see it, and sometimes Mother would go too, to sit there in the dark while the pistols popped and snapped and the horses galloped and each time it would look like they were going to catch him but you knew they wouldn't quite, that there would be some more of it next Saturday and the one after that and the one after that, and always the week in between for me and Pete to talk about the villain's pearl-handled pistol that Pete wished was his and the hero's spotted horse that I wished was mine. Then one Saturday Mother decided to take Grandpap. He sat between her and me,

already asleep again, so old now that he didn't even have to snore, until the time came that you could have set a watch by every Saturday afternoon: when the horses all came plunging down the cliff and whirled around and came boiling up the gully until in just one more jump they would come clean out of the screen and go galloping among the little faces turned up to them like corn shucks scattered across a lot. Then Grandpap waked up. For about five seconds he sat perfectly still. I could even feel him sitting still, he sat so still so hard. Then he said, "Cavalry!" Then he was on his feet. "Forrest!" he said. "Bedford Forrest! Get out of here! Get out of the way!" clawing and scrabbling from one seat to the next one whether there was anybody in them or not, into the aisle with us trying to follow and catch him, and up the aisle toward the door still hollering, "Forrest! Forrest! Here he comes! Get out of the way!" and outside at last, with half the show behind us and Grandpap blinking and trembling at the light and Pete propped against the wall by his arms like he was being sick, laughing, and father shaking Grandpap's arm and saying, "You old fool! You old fool!" until Mother made him stop. And we half carried him around to the alley where the wagon was hitched and helped him in and Mother got in and sat by him, holding his hand until he could begin to stop shaking. "Go get him a bottle of beer," she said.

"He don't deserve any beer," Father said. "The old fool, having the whole town laughing. . . ."

"Go get him some beer!" Mother said. "He's going to sit right here in his own wagon and drink it. Go on!" And Father did, and Mother held the bottle until Grandpap got a good hold on it, and she sat holding his hand until he got a good swallow down him. Then he begun to stop shaking. He said, "Ah-h-h," and took another swallow and said,

"Ah-h-h," again and then he even drew his other hand out of Mother's and he wasn't trembling now but just a little, taking little darting sips at the bottle and saying "Hah!" and taking another sip and saying "Hah!" again, and not just looking at the bottle now but looking all around, and his eyes snapping a little when he blinked. "Fools yourselves!" Mother cried at Father and Pete and me. "He wasn't running from anybody! He was running in front of them, hollering at all clods to look out because better men than they were coming, even seventy-five years afterwards, still powerful, still dangerous, still coming!"

And I knew them too. I had seen them too, who had never been further from Frenchman's Bend than I could return by night to sleep. It was like the wheel, like the sunset itself, hubbed at that little place that don't even show on a map, that not two hundred people out of all the earth know is named Frenchman's Bend or has any name at all, and spoking out in all the directions and touching them all, never a one too big for it to touch, never a one too little to be remembered:—the places that men and women have lived in and loved whether they had anything to paint pictures of them with or not, all the little places quiet enough to be lived in and loved and the names of them before they were quiet enough, and the names of the deeds that made them quiet enough and the names of the men and the women who did the deeds, who lasted and endured and fought the battles and lost them and fought again because they didn't even know they had been whipped, and tamed the wilderness and overpassed the mountains and deserts and died and still went on as the shape of the United States grew and went on. I knew them too: the men and women still powerful seventy-five years and twice that and twice that again afterward, still powerful and still dangerous and still com-

ing, North and South and East and West, until the name of what they did and what they died for became just one single word, louder than any thunder. It was America, and it covered all the western earth.

Centaur in Brass

I

IN OUR TOWN Flem Snopes now has a monument to himself, a monument of brass, none the less enduring for the fact that, though it is constantly in sight of the whole town and visible from three or four points miles out in the country, only four people, two white men and two Negroes, know that it is his monument, or that it is a monument at all.

He came to Jefferson from the country, accompanied by his wife and infant daughter and preceded by a reputation for shrewd and secret dealing. There lives in our county a sewing-machine agent named Suratt, who used to own a half interest in a small back-street restaurant in town—himself no mean hand at that technically unassailable opportunism which passes with country folks—and town folks, too—for honest shrewdness.

He travels about the county steadily and constantly, and it was through him that Snope's doings first came to our ears: how first, a clerk in a country store, Snopes one day and to everyone's astonishment was married to the store owner's daughter, a young girl who was the belle of the countryside. They were married suddenly, on the same day upon which three of the girl's erstwhile suitors left the county and were seen no more.

Soon after the wedding Snopes and his wife moved to Texas, from where the wife returned a year later with a well-

grown baby. A month later Snopes himself returned, accompanied by a broad-hatted stranger and a herd of half-wild mustang ponies, which the stranger auctioned off, collected the money, and departed. Then the purchasers discovered that none of the ponies had ever had a bridle on. But they never learned if Snopes had had any part in the business, or had received any part of the money.

The next we heard of him was when he appeared one day in a wagon laden with his family and household goods, and with a bill-of-sale for Suratt's half of the restaurant. How he got the bill-of-sale, Suratt never told, and we never learned more than that there was somehow involved in the affair a worthless piece of land which had been a portion of Mrs. Snopes's dowry. But what the business was even Suratt, a humorous, talkative man who was as ready to laugh at a joke on himself as at one on anyone else, never told. But when he mentioned Snopes's name after that, it was in a tone of savage and sardonic and ungrudging admiration.

"Yes, sir," he said, "Flem Snopes outsmarted me. And the man that can do that, I just wish I was him, with this whole State of Mississippi to graze on."

In the restaurant business Snopes appeared to prosper. That is, he soon eliminated his partner, and presently he was out of the restaurant himself, with a hired manager to run it, and we began to believe in the town that we knew what was the mainspring of his rise and luck. We believed that it was his wife; we accepted without demur the evil which such little lost towns like ours seem to foist even upon men who are of good thinking despite them. She helped in the restaurant at first. We could see her there behind the wooden counter worn glass-smooth by elbows in their eating generations: young, with the rich coloring of a calendar; a face smooth, unblemished by any thought or by anything else: an appeal immediate and profound and without calculation

or shame, with (because of its unblemishment and not its size) something of that vast, serene, impervious beauty of a snowclad virgin mountain flank, listening and not smiling while Major Hoxey, the town's lone rich middle-aged bachelor, graduate of Yale and soon to be mayor of the town, incongruous there among the collarless shirts and the overalls and the grave, country-eating faces, sipped his coffee and talked to her.

Not impregnable: impervious. That was why it did not need gossip when we watched Snopes's career mount beyond the restaurant and become complement with Major Hoxey's in city affairs, until less than six months after Hoxey's inauguration Snopes, who had probably never been close to any piece of machinery save a grindstone until he moved to town, was made superintendent of the municipal power plant. Mrs. Snopes was born one of those women the deeds and fortunes of whose husbands alone are the barometers of their good name; for to do her justice, there was no other handle for gossip save her husband's rise in Hoxey's administration.

But there was still that intangible thing: partly something in her air, her face; partly what we had already heard about Flem Snopes's methods. Or perhaps what we knew or believed about Snopes was all; perhaps what we thought to be her shadow was merely his shadow falling upon her. But anyway, when we saw Snopes and Hoxey together we would think of them and of adultery in the same instant, and we would think of the two of them walking and talking in amicable cuckoldry. Perhaps, as I said, this was the fault of the town. Certainly it was the fault of the town that the idea of their being on amicable terms outraged us more than the idea of the adultery itself. It seemed foreign, decadent, perverted: we could have accepted, if not condoned, the adultery had they only been natural and logical and enemies.

But they were not. Yet neither could they have been called

friends. Snopes had no friends; there was no man nor woman among us, not even Hoxey or Mrs. Snopes, who we believed could say, "I know his thought"—least of all, those among whom we saw him now and then, sitting about the stove in the rear of a certain smelly, third-rate grocery, listening and not talking, for an hour or so two or three nights a week. And so we believed that, whatever his wife was, she was not fooling him. It was another woman who did that: a Negro woman, the new young wife of Tom-Tom, the day fireman in the power plant.

Tom-Tom was black: a big bull of a man weighing two hundred pounds and sixty years old and looking about forty. He had been married about a year to his third wife, a young woman whom he kept with the strictness of a Turk in a cabin two miles from town and from the power plant where he spent twelve hours a day with shovel and bar.

One afternoon he had just finished cleaning the fires and he was sitting in the coal-bunker, resting and smoking his pipe, when Snopes, his superintendent, employer and boss, came in. The fires were clean and the steam was up again, and the safety valve on the middle boiler was blowing off.

Snopes entered: a potty man of no particular age, broad and squat, in a clean though collarless white shirt and a plaid cap. His face was round and smooth, either absolutely impenetrable or absolutely empty. His eyes were the color of stagnant water; his mouth was a tight, lipless seam. Chewing steadily, he looked up at the whistling safety valve.

"How much does that whistle weigh?" he said after a time.

"Must weight ten pound, anyway," Tom-Tom said.

"Is it solid brass?"

"If it ain't, I ain't never seed no brass what *is* solid," Tom-Tom said.

Snopes had not once looked at Tom-Tom. He continued to look upward toward the thin, shrill, excruciating sound of the valve. Then he spat, and turned and left the boiler-room.

II

HE BUILT HIS monument slowly. But then, it is always strange to what involved and complex methods a man will resort in order to steal something. It's as though there were some intangible and invisible social force that mitigates against him, confounding his own shrewdness with his own cunning, distorting in his judgment the very value of the object of his greed, which in all probability, had he but picked it up and carried it openly away, nobody would have remarked or cared. But then, that would not have suited Snopes, since he apparently had neither the high vision of a confidence man nor the unrecking courage of a brigand.

His vision at first, his aim, was not even that high; it was no higher than that of a casual tramp who pauses in passing to steal three eggs from beneath a setting hen. Or perhaps he was merely not certain yet that there really was a market for brass. Because his next move was five months after Harker, the night engineer, came on duty one evening and found the three safety whistles gone and the vents stopped with one-inch steel screw plugs capable of a pressure of a thousand pounds.

"And them three boiler heads you could poke a hole through with a soda straw!" Harker said. "And that damn black night fireman, Turl, that couldn't even read a clock face, still throwing coal into them! When I looked at the gauge on the first boiler, I never believed I would get to the last boiler in time to even reach the injector.

"So when I finally got it into Turl's head that that 100 on that dial meant where Turl would not only lose his job, he would lose it so good they wouldn't even be able to find the job to give it to the next misbegotten that believed that live steam was something you blowed on a window pane in cold weather, I got settled down enough to ask him where them safety valves had gone to.

" 'Mr. Snopes took um off,' Turl says.

" 'What in the hell for?'

" 'I don't know. I just telling you what Tom-Tom told me. He say Mr. Snopes say the shut-off float in the water tank ain't heavy enough. Say that tank start leaking some day, and so he going to fasten them three safety valves on the float and make it heavier.'

" 'You mean—' I says. That's as far as I could get: 'You mean ——'

" 'That what Tom-Tom say. I don't know nothing about it.'

"But they were gone. Up to that night, me and Turl had been catching forty winks or so now and then when we got caught up and things was quiet. But you can bet we never slept none that night. Me and him spent that whole night, time about, on that coal pile, where we could watch them three gauges. And from midnight on, after the load went off, we never had enough steam in all three of them boilers put together to run a peanut parcher. And even when I was in bed, at home, I couldn't sleep. Time I shut my eyes I would begin to see a steam gauge about the size of a washtub, with a red needle big as a shovel moving up toward a hundred pounds, and I would wake myself up hollering and sweating."

But even that wore away after a while, and then Turl and Harker were catching their forty winks or so again. Perhaps they decided that Snopes had stolen his three eggs and was done. Perhaps they decided that he had frightened himself with the ease with which he had got the eggs. Because it was five months before the next act took place.

Then one afternoon, with his fires cleaned and steam up again, Tom-Tom, smoking his pipe on the coal pile, saw Snopes enter, carrying in his hand an object which Tom-Tom said later he thought was a mule shoe. He watched

Snopes retire into a dim corner behind the boilers, where there had accumulated a miscellaneous pile of metal junk, all covered with dirt: fittings, valves, rods and bolts and such, and, kneeling there, begin to sort the pieces, touching them one by one with the mule shoe and from time to time removing one piece and tossing it behind him, into the runway. Tom-Tom watched him try with the magnet every loose piece of metal in the boiler-room, sorting out the iron from the brass: then Snopes ordered Tom-Tom to gather up the segregated pieces of brass and bring them in to his office.

Tom-Tom gathered the pieces into a box. Snopes was waiting in the office. He glanced once into the box, then he spat. "How do you and Turl get along?" he said. Turl, I had better repeat, was the night fireman; a Negro too, though he was saddle-colored where Tom-Tom was black, and in place of Tom-Tom's two hundred pounds Turl, even with his laden shovel, would hardly have tipped a hundred and fifty.

"I tends to my business," Tom-Tom said. "What Turl does wid hisn ain't no trouble of mine."

"That ain't what Turl thinks," Snopes said, chewing, watching Tom-Tom, who looked at Snopes as steadily in turn; looked down at him. "Turl wants me to give him your day shift. He says he's tired firing at night."

"Let him fire here long as I is, and he can have it," Tom-Tom said.

"Turl don't want to wait that long," Snopes said, chewing, watching Tom-Tom's face. Then he told Tom-Tom how Turl was planning to steal some iron from the plant and lay it at Tom-Tom's door and so get Tom-Tom fired. And Tom-Tom stood there, huge, hulking, with his hard round little head. "That's what he's up to," Snopes said. "So I want you to take this stuff out to your house and hide it where Turl can't find it. And as soon as I get enough evidence on Turl, I'm going to fire him."

Tom-Tom waited until Snopes had finished, blinking his eyes slowly. Then he said immediately: "I knows a better way than that."

"What way?" Snopes said. Tom-Tom didn't answer. He stood, big, humorless, a little surly; quiet; more than a little implacable though heartless. "No, no," Snopes said. "That won't do. You have any trouble with Turl, and I'll fire you both. You do like I say, unless you are tired of your job and want Turl to have it. Are you tired of it?"

"Ain't no man complained about my pressure yet," Tom-Tom said sullenly.

"Then you do like I say. You take that stuff out home with you tonight. Don't let nobody see you; not even your wife. And if you don't want to do it, just say so. I reckon I can get somebody that will do it."

And that's what Tom-Tom did. And he kept his own counsel too, even when afterward, as discarded fittings and such accumulated again, he would watch Snopes test them one by one with the magnet and sort him out another batch to take out home and hide. Because he had been firing those boilers for forty years, ever since he was a man. At that time there was but one boiler, and he had got twelve dollars a month for firing it, but now there were three, and he got sixty dollars a month; and now he was sixty, and he owned his little cabin and a little piece of corn, and a mule and a wagon in which he rode into town to church twice each Sunday, with his new young wife beside him and a gold watch and chain.

And Harker didn't know then, either, even though he would watch the junked metal accumulate in the corner and then disappear over night until it came to be his nightly joke to enter with his busy, bustling air and say to Turl: "Well, Turl, I notice that little engine is still running. There's a right smart of brass in them bushings and wrist pins, but I reckon

it's moving too fast to hold that magnet against it." Then more soberly; quite soberly, in fact, without humor or irony at all, since there was some of Suratt in Harker too: "That durn fellow! I reckon he'd sell the boilers too, if he knowed of any way you and Tom-Tom could keep steam up without them."

And Turl didn't answer. Because by that time Turl had his own private temptations and worries, the same as Tom-Tom, of which Harker was also unaware.

In the meantime, the first of the year came and the city was audited.

"They come down here," Harker said, "two of them, in glasses. They went over the books and they poked around everywhere, counting everything in sight and writing it down. Then they went back to the office and they was still there at six o'clock when I come on. It seems that there was something wrong; it seems like there was some old brass parts wrote down in the books, only the brass seemed to be missing or something. It was on the books all right, and the new valves and things it had been replaced with was there. But be durn if they could find a one of them old pieces except one busted bib that had got mislaid under the work-bench some-way or other. It was right strange. So I went back with them and held the light while they looked again in all the corners, getting a right smart of soot and grease on them, but that brass just naturally seemed to be plumb missing. So they went away.

"And the next morning early they come back. They had the city clerk with them this time and they beat Mr. Snopes down here and so they had to wait till he come in in his check cap and his chew, chewing and looking at them while they told him. They was right sorry; they hemmed and hawed a right smart, being sorry. But it wasn't nothing else they could do except to come back on him, long as he was the superin-

tendent; and did he want me and Turl and Tom-Tom arrested right now, or would tomorrow do? And him standing there, chewing, with them eyes like two gobs of cup grease on a hunk of raw dough, and them still telling him how sorry they was.

“‘How much does it come to?’ he says.

“‘Three hundred and four dollars and fifty-two cents, Mr. Snopes.’

“‘Is that the full amount?’

“‘We checked our figures twice, Mr. Snopes.’

“‘All right,’ he says. And he reaches down and hauls out the money and pays them the three hundred and four dollars and fifty-two cents in cash, and asks for a receipt.”

III

THEN THE NEXT Summer came, with Harker still laughing at and enjoying what he saw, and seeing so little, thinking how they were all fooling one another while he looked on, when it was him who was being fooled. For in that Summer the thing ripened, came to a head. Or maybe Snopes just decided to cut his first hay crop; clean the meadow for reseeding. Because he could never have believed that on the day when he sent for Turl, he had set the capital on his monument and had started to tear the scaffolding down.

It was in the evening; he returned to the plant after supper and sent for Turl; again two of them, white man and Negro, faced one another in the office.

“What’s this about you and Tom-Tom?” Snopes said.

“‘Bout me and which?’” Turl said. “If Tom-Tom depending on me for his trouble, he sho’ done quit being a fireman and turned waiter. It take two folks to have trouble, and Tom-Tom ain’t but one, I don’t care how big he is.”

Snopes watched Turl. "Tom-Tom thinks you want to fire the day shift."

Turl looked down. He looked briefly at Snopes's face; at the still eyes, the slow unceasing jaw, and down again. "I can handle as much coal as Tom-Tom," he said.

Snopes watched him: the smooth, brown, aside-looking face. "Tom-Tom knows that, too. He knows he's getting old. But he knows there ain't nobody else can crowd him but you." Then, watching Turl's face, Snopes told him how for two years Tom-Tom had been stealing brass from the plant, in order to lay it on Turl and get him fired; how only that day Tom-Tom had told him that Turl was the thief.

Turl looked up. "That's a lie," he said. "Can't no nigger accuse me of stealing when I ain't, I don't care how big he is."

"Sho'," Snopes said. "So the thing to do is to get that brass back."

"If Tom-Tom got it, I reckon Mr. Buck Conner the man to get it back," Turl said. Buck Conner was the city marshal.

"Then you'll go to jail, sure enough. Tom-Tom'll say he didn't know it was there. You'll be the only one that knew it was there. So what you reckon Buck Conner'll think? You'll be the one that knew where it was hid at, and Buck Conner'll know that even a fool has got more sense than to steal something and hide it in his corn-crib. The only thing you can do is to get that brass back. Go out there in the daytime, while Tom-Tom is at work, and get it and bring it to me and I'll put it away somewhere to use as evidence on Tom-Tom. Unless maybe you don't want that day shift. Just say so, if you don't. I reckon I can find somebody else that does."

And Turl agreed to do that. He hadn't fired any boilers for forty years. He hadn't done anything at all for as long as forty years, since he was just past thirty. But even if he were

a hundred, no man could ever accuse him of having done anything that would aggregate forty years net. "Unless Turl's night prowling might add up that much," Harker said. "If Turl ever gets married, he wan't need no front door a-tall; he wouldn't know what it was for. If he couldn't come tom-catting in through the back window, he wouldn't know what he come after. Would you, Turl?"

So from here on it is simple enough, since a man's mistakes, like his successes, usually are simple. Particularly the success. Perhaps that's why it is so often missed: it was just overlooked.

"His mistake was in picking out Turl to pull his chestnuts," Harker said. "But even Turl wasn't as bad as the second mistake he made at the same time without knowing it. And that was, when he forgot about that high yellow wife of Tom-Tom's. When I found out how he had picked out Turl, out of all the niggers in Jefferson, that's prowled at least once (or tried to) every gal within ten miles of town, to go out to Tom-Tom's house knowing all the time how Tom-Tom would be down here wrastling coal until seven o'clock and then have two miles to walk home, and expect Turl to spend his time out there hunting for anything that ain't hid in Tom-Tom's bed, and when I would think about Tom-Tom down here, wrastling them boilers with this same amical cuckoldry like the fellow said about Mr. Snopes and Colonel Hoxey, stealing brass so he can keep Turl from getting his job away from him, and Turl out yonder tending to Tom-Tom's home business at the same time, sometimes I think I will die.

"It was bound to not last. The question was, which would happen first: if Tom-Tom would catch Turl, or if Mr. Snopes would catch Turl, or if I would bust a blood vessel laughing some night. Well, it was Turl. He seemed to be having too much trouble locating that brass; he had been hunting it for three weeks already, coming in a little late

almost every night now, with Tom-Tom having to wait until Turl come before he could start home. Maybe that was it. Or maybe Mr. Snopes was out there himself one day, hid in the bushes too, waiting for it to get along toward dark (it was already April then); him on one side of Tom-Tom's house and Turl creeping up through the corn patch on the other. Anyway, he come back down here one night and he was waiting when Turl come in about a half hour late, as usual, and Tom-Tom all ready to go home soon as Turl got here. Mr. Snopes sent for Turl and asked him if he had found it.

“ ‘Find it when?’ Turl says.

“ ‘While you was out there hunting for it about dusk to-night,’ Mr. Snopes says. And there’s Turl, wondering just how much Mr. Snopes knows, and if he can risk saying how he has been at home in bed since six-thirty this morning, or maybe up to Mottstown on business. ‘Maybe you are still looking for it in the wrong place,’ Mr. Snopes says, watching Turl, and Turl not looking at Mr. Snopes except maybe now and then. ‘If Tom-Tom had hid that iron in his bed, you ought to done found it three weeks ago,’ Mr. Snopes says. ‘So suppose you look in that corn-crib where I told you to look.’

“So Turl went out to look one more time. But he couldn’t seem to find it in the corn-crib neither. Leastways, that’s what he told Mr. Snopes when Mr. Snopes finally run him down back here about nine o’clock one night. Turl was on a kind of a spot, you might say. He would have to wait until along toward dark to go up to the house, and already Tom-Tom had been grumblin’ some about how Turl was getting later and later about coming to work every night. And once he found that brass, he would have to begin getting back to the plant at seven o’clock, and the days getting longer all the time.

"So Turl goes back to give one more go-round for that brass evidence. But still he can't find it. He must have looked under every shuck and thread in Tom-Tom's bed tick, but without no more success than them two audits had. He just couldn't seem to find that evidence nohow. So then Mr. Snopes says he will give Turl one more chance, and if he don't find that evidence this time, Mr. Snopes is going to tell Tom-Tom how there is a strange tom-cat on his back fence. And whenever a nigger husband in Jefferson hears that, he finds out where Turl is at before he even sharpens his razor: ain't that so, Turl?"

"So the next evening Turl goes out to look again. To do or die this time. He comes creeping up out of the woods about sundown, the best time of day for brass hunting, specially as there is a moon that night. So here he comes, creeping up through the corn patch to the back porch, where the cot is, and pretty soon he can make out somebody in a white nightgown laying on the cot. But Turl don't rise up and walk even then; that ain't Turl's way. Turl plays by the rules. He creeps up—it's dust-dark by then, and the moon beginning to shine a little—all careful and quiet, and tom-cats up on to the back porch and stoops over the cot and puts his hand on nekkid meat and says, 'Honeybunch, papa's done arrived.'"

IV

IN THE VERY QUIET hearing of it I seemed to partake for the instant of Turl's horrid surprise. Because it was Tom-Tom on the cot; Tom-Tom, whom Turl believed to be at the moment two miles away, waiting for Turl to come and take over from him at the power plant.

The night before, on his return home Tom-Tom had brought with him a last year's watermelon which the local butcher had kept all Winter in cold storage and which he

had given to Tom-Tom, being himself afraid to eat it, and a pint of whiskey. Tom-Tom and his wife consumed them and went to bed, where an hour later she waked Tom-Tom by her screaming. She was violently ill, and she was afraid that she was dying. She was too frightened to let Tom-Tom go for help, and while he dosed her as he could, she confessed to him about herself and Turl. As soon as she told it she became easier and went off to sleep, either before she had time to realize the enormity of what she had done, or while she was still too occupied in being alive to care.

But Tom-Tom wasn't. The next morning, after he convinced himself that she was all right, he reminded her of it. She wept some, and tried to retract; she ran the gamut of tears to anger, through denial and cajolery back to tears again. But she had Tom-Tom's face to look at all the while, and so after a time she hushed and she just lay there, watching him as he went methodically about cooking breakfast, her own and his, saying no word, apparently oblivious of even her presence. Then he fed her, made her eat, with the same detachment, implacable and without heat. She was waiting for him to leave for work; she was doubtless then and had been all the while inventing and discarding practical expedients; so busy that it was mid-morning before she realized that he had no intention of going to town, though she did not know that he had arranged to get word to the plant by seven that morning that he would take the day off.

So she lay there in the bed, quite quiet, her eyes a little wide, still as an animal, while he cooked their dinner and fed her again with that clumsy and implacable care. And just before sundown he locked her in the bedroom, she still saying no word, not asking him what he was about, just watching with her quiet, still eyes the door until it closed and the key clicked. Then Tom-Tom put on one of her nightgowns and with a naked butcher knife beside him, he lay down on the

cot on the back porch. And there he was, without having moved for almost an hour, when Turl crept on to the porch and touched him.

In the purely reflex action of Turl's turning to flee, Tom-Tom rose, clutching the knife, and sprang at Turl. He leaped astride of Turl's neck and shoulders; his weight was the impetus which sent Turl off the porch, already running when his feet touched earth, carrying with him on the retina of his fear a single dreadful glint of moonlight on the blade of the lifted knife, as he crossed the back lot and, with Tom-Tom on his back, entered the trees—the two of them a strange and furious beast with two heads and a single pair of legs like an inverted centaur speeding phantomlike just ahead of the boardlike streaming of Tom-Tom's shirt-tail and just beneath the silver glint of the lifted knife, through the moony April woods.

"Tom-Tom big buck man," Turl said. "Make three of me. But I sho' toted him. And whenever I would see the moon glint that butcher knife, I could a picked up two more like him without even stopping." He said that at first he just ran; it was only when he found himself among the trees that it occurred to him that his only hope was to rake Tom-Tom off against a tree trunk. "But he helt on so tight with that one arm that whenever I busted him into a tree, I had to bust into the tree too. And then we'd bounce off and I'd catch that moonglint in that nekkid knife, and I could a picked up two more Tom-Toms.

"'Bout that time was when Tom-Tom started squalling. He was holding on with both hands then, so I knowed that I had done outrun that butcher knife anyhow. But I was good started then; my feets never paid Tom-Tom no more mind when he started squalling to stop and let him off than they did me. Then Tom-Tom grabbed my head with both hands and begun to haul it around like I was a runaway bareback

mule, and then I seed the ditch. It was about forty foot deep and it looked a solid mile across, but it was too late then. My feets never even slowed up. They run far as from here to that door yonder out into nekkid air before us even begun to fall. And they was still clawing that moonlight when me and Tom-Tom hit the bottom."

The first thing I wanted to know was, what Tom-Tom used in lieu of the butcher knife which he had dropped. He didn't use anything. He and Turl just sat there in the ditch and talked. Because there is a sanctuary beyond despair for any beast which has dared all, which even its mortal enemy respects. Or maybe it was just nigger nature. Anyway, it was perfectly plain to both of them as they sat there, perhaps panting a little while they talked, that Tom-Tom's home had been outraged, not by Turl, but by Flem Snopes; that Turl's life and limbs had been endangered, not by Tom-Tom, but by Flem Snopes.

That was so plain to them that they sat there quietly in the ditch, getting their wind back, talking a little without heat like two acquaintances meeting in the street; so plain that they made their concerted plan without recourse to definite words on the subject. They merely compared notes; perhaps they laughed a little at themselves. Then they climbed out of the ditch and returned to Tom-Tom's cabin, where Tom-Tom unlocked his wife, and he and Turl sat before the hearth while the woman prepared a meal for them, which they ate as quietly but without loss of time: the two grave, scratched faces leaned to the same lamp, above the same dishes, while in the background the woman watched them, shadowy and covert and unspeaking.

Tom-Tom took her to the barn with them to help load the brass into the wagon, where Turl spoke for the first time since they climbed together out of the ditch in Harker's

"amical" cuckoldry: "Great God, man, how long did it take you to tote all this stuff out here?"

"Not long," Tom-Tom said. "Been working at it 'bout two years."

It required four trips in the wagon; it was daybreak when the last load was disposed of, and the sun was rising when Turl entered the power plant, eleven hours late.

"Where in hell you been?" Harker said.

Turl glanced up at the three gauges, his scratched face wearing an expression of monkeylike gravity. "Been helping a friend of mine."

"Helping what friend of yours?"

"Boy named Turl," Turl said, squinting at the gauges.

V

"AND THAT WAS all he said," Harker said. "And me looking at that scratched face of hisn, and at the mate of it that Tom-Tom brought in at six o'clock. But Turl didn't tell me then. And I ain't the only one he never told nothing that morning. Because Mr. Snopes got there before six o'clock, before Turl had got away. He sent for Turl and asked him if he had found that brass and Turl told him no.

" 'Why didn't you find it?' Mr. Snopes said.

"Turl didn't look away, this time. 'Because it ain't no brass there. That's the main reason.'

" 'How do you know there ain't?' Mr. Snopes says.

"And Turl looked him straight in them eyes. 'Because Tom-Tom say it ain't,' Turl says.

"Maybe he ought to knew then. But a man will go to any length to fool himself; he will tell himself stuff and believe it that he would be downright mad with a fellow he had done trimmed for believing it. So now he sends for Tom-Tom.

" 'I ain't got no brass,' Tom-Tom says.

"Where is it, then?"

"It's where you said you wanted it."

"Where I said I wanted it when?"

"When you took them whistle valves off the boilers," Tom-Tom says.

"That's what whipped him. He didn't dare to fire neither one of them, you see. And so he'd have to see one of them there all day long every day, and know that the other one was there all night long every night; he would have to know that during every twenty-four hours that passed, one or the other of them was there, getting paid—paid, mind you, by the hour—for living half their lives right there under that tank with them four loads of brass in it that now belonged to him by right of purchase and which he couldn't claim now because now he had done waited too late.

"It sure was too late. But next New Year it got later. Come New Year's and the town got audited again; again them two spectacled fellows come down here and checked the books and went away and come back with not only the city clerk, but with Buck Conner too, with a warrant for Turl and Tom-Tom. And there they were, hemming and hawing, being sorry again, pushing one another in front to talk. It seems how they had made a mistake two years ago, and instead of three-hundred-and-four-fifty-two of this here evaporating brass, there was five-hundred-and-twenty-five dollars worth, leaving a net of over two-hundred-and-twenty dollars. And there was Buck Conner with the warrant, all ready to arrest Turl and Tom-Tom when he give the word, and it so happening that Turl and Tom-Tom was both in the boiler-room at that moment, changing shifts.

"So Snopes paid them. Dug down and hauled out the money and paid them the two-hundred-and-twenty and got his receipt. And about two hours later I happened to pass through the office. At first I didn't see nobody, because the

white house where he had been born on the edge of town, he and an old nigger named Job Wylie that was older than he was even, that cooked and kept the house and was the porter at the drugstore which Uncle Willy's father had established and which Uncle Willy ran without any other help than old Job; and during the twelve or fourteen years (the life of us as children and then boys), while he just used dope, we saw a lot of him. We liked to go to his store because it was always cool and dim and quiet inside because he never washed the windows; he said the reason was that he never had to bother to dress them because nobody could see in anyway, and so the heat couldn't get in either. And he never had any customers except country people buying patent medicines that were already in bottles, and niggers buying cards and dice, because nobody had let him fill a prescription in forty years I reckon, and he never had any soda fountain trade because it was old Job who washed the glasses and mixed the syrups and made the ice cream ever since Uncle Willy's father started the business in eighteen-fifty-something and so old Job couldn't see very well now, though papa said he didn't think that old Job took dope too, it was from breathing day and night the air which Uncle Willy had just exhaled.

But the ice cream tasted all right to us, especially when we came in hot from the ball games. We had a league of three teams in town and Uncle Willy would give the prize, a ball or a bat or a mask, for each game though he would never come to see us play, so after the game both teams and maybe all three would go to the store to watch the winner get the prize. And we would eat the ice cream and then we would all go behind the prescription case and watch Uncle Willy light the little alcohol stove and fill the needle and roll his sleeve up over the little blue myriad punctures starting at his elbow and going right on up into his shirt. And the next

day would be Sunday and we would wait in our yards and fall in with him as he passed from house to house and go on to Sunday school, Uncle Willy with us, in the same class with us, sitting there while we recited. Mr. Barbour from the Sunday school never called on him. Then we would finish the lesson and we would talk about baseball until the bell rang and Uncle Willy still not saying anything, just sitting there all neat and clean, with his clean collar and no tie and weighing about a hundred and ten pounds and his eyes behind his glasses kind of all run together like broken eggs. Then we would all go to the store and eat the ice cream that was left over from Saturday and then go behind the prescription case and watch him again: the little stove and his Sunday shirt rolled up and the needle going slow into his blue arm and somebody would say, "Don't it hurt?" and he would say, "No. I like it."

II

THEN THEY made him quit dope. He had been using it for forty years, he told us once, and now he was sixty and he had about ten years more at the outside, only he didn't tell us that because he didn't need to tell even fourteen-year-old boys that. But they made him quit. It didn't take them long. It began one Sunday morning and it was finished by the next Friday; we had just sat down in our class and Mr. Barbour had just begun, when all of a sudden Reverend Schultz, the minister, was there, leaning over Uncle Willy and already hauling him out of his seat when we looked around, hauling him up and saying in that tone in which preachers speak to fourteen-year-old boys that I don't believe even pansy boys like: "Now, Brother Christian, I know you will hate to leave Brother Barbour's class, but let's you and I go in and join Brother Miller and the men and hear what he can tell

us on this beautiful and heartwarming text," and Uncle Willy still trying to hold back and looking around at us with his run-together eyes blinking and saying plainer than if he had spoke it: "What's this? What's this, fellows? What are they fixing to do to me?"

We didn't know any more than he did. We just finished the lesson; we didn't talk any baseball that day; and we passed the alcove where Mr. Miller's men's Bible class met, with Reverend Schultz sitting in the middle of them like he did every Sunday, like he was just a plain man like the rest of them yet kind of bulging out from among the others like he didn't have to move or speak to keep them reminded that he wasn't a plain man; and I would always think about April Fool's one year when Miss Callaghan called the roll and then stepped down from her desk and said, "Now I'm going to be a pupil today," and took a vacant seat and called out a name and made them go to her desk and hold the lesson and it would have been fun if you could have just quit remembering that tomorrow wouldn't be April Fool's and the day after that wouldn't be either. And Uncle Willy was sitting by Reverend Schultz looking littler than ever, and I thought about one day last summer when they took a country man named Bundren to the asylum at Jackson but he wasn't too crazy not to know where he was going, sitting there in the coach window handcuffed to a fat deputy sheriff that was smoking a cigar.

Then Sunday school was over and we went out to wait for him, to go to the store and eat the ice cream. And he didn't come out. He didn't come out until church was over too, the first time that he had ever stayed for church that any of us knew of—that anybody knew of, papa told me later—coming out with Mrs. Merridew on one side of him and Reverend Schultz on the other still holding him by the arm and he looking around at us again with his eyes saying

again only desperate now: "Fellows, what's this? What's this, fellows?" and Reverend Schultz shoving him into Mrs. Merridew's car and Mrs. Merridew saying, loud, like she was in the pulpit: "Now, Mr. Christian, I'm going to take you right out to my house and I'm going to fix you a nice glass of cool lemonade and then we will have a nice chicken dinner and then you are going to take a nice nap in my hammock and then Brother and Sister Schultz are coming out and we will have some nice ice cream," and Uncle Willy saying, "No. Wait, ma'am, wait! Wait! I got to go to the store and fill a prescription I promised this morning—"

So they shoved him into the car and him looking back at us where we stood there; he went out of sight like that, sitting beside Mrs. Merridew in the car like Darl Bundren and the deputy on the train, and I reckon she was holding his wrist and I reckon she never needed any handcuffs and Uncle Willy giving us that single look of amazed and desperate despair.

Because now he was already an hour past the time for his needle and that afternoon when he finally slipped away from Mrs. Merridew he was five hours past it and so he couldn't even get the key into the lock, and so Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz caught him and this time he wasn't talking or looking either: he was trying to get away like a half-wild cat tries to get away. They took him to his home and Mrs. Merridew telegraphed his sister in Texas and Uncle Willy didn't come to town for three days because Mrs. Merridew and Mrs. Hovis took turn about staying in the house with him day and night until his sister could get there. That was vacation then and we played the game on Monday and that afternoon the store was still locked and Tuesday it was still locked, and so it was not until Wednesday afternoon and Uncle Willy was running fast.

He didn't have any shirt on and he hadn't shaved and he

could not get the key into the lock at all, panting and whimpering and saying, "She went to sleep at last; she went to sleep at last," until one of us took the key and unlocked the door. We had to light the little stove too and fill the needle and this time it didn't go into his arm slow, it looked like he was trying to jab it clean through the bone. He didn't go back home. He said he wouldn't need anything to sleep on and he gave us the money and let us out the back door and we bought the sandwiches and the bottle of coffee from the café and we left him there.

Then the next day, it was Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz and three more ladies; they had the marshal break in the door and Mrs. Merridew holding Uncle Willy by the back of the neck and shaking him and kind of whispering, "You little wretch! You little wretch! Slip off from *me*, will you?" and Reverend Schultz saying, "Now, Sister; now, Sister; control yourself," and the other ladies hollering Mr. Christian and Uncle Willy and Willy, according to how old they were or how long they had lived in Jefferson. It didn't take them long.

The sister got there from Texas that night and we would walk past the house and see the ladies on the front porch or going in and out, and now and then Reverend Schultz kind of bulging out from among them like he would out of Mr. Miller's Bible class, and we could crawl up behind the hedge and hear them through the window, hear Uncle Willy crying and cussing and fighting to get out of the bed and the ladies saying, "Now, Mr. Christian; now, Uncle Willy," and "Now, Bubber," too, since his sister was there; and Uncle Willy crying and praying and cussing. And then it was Friday, and he gave up. We could hear them holding him in the bed; I reckon this was his last go-round, because none of them had time to talk now; and then we heard him, his voice weak but clear and his breath going in and out.

"Wait," he said. "Wait! I will ask it one more time. Won't you please quit? Won't you please go away? Won't you please go to hell and just let me come on at my own gait?"

"No, Mr. Christian," Mrs. Merridew said. "We are doing this to save you."

For a minute we didn't hear anything. Then we heard Uncle Willy lay back in the bed, kind of flop back.

"All right," he said. "All right."

It was like one of those sheep they would sacrifice back in the Bible. It was like it had climbed up onto the altar itself and flopped onto its back with its throat held up and said: "All right. Come on and get it over with. Cut my damn throat and go away and let me lay quiet in the fire."

III

HE WAS SICK for a long time. They took him to Memphis and they said that he was going to die. The store stayed locked all the time now, and after a few weeks we didn't even keep up the league. It wasn't just the balls and the bats. It wasn't that. We would pass the store and look at the big old lock on it and at the windows you couldn't even see through, couldn't even see inside where we used to eat the ice cream and tell him who beat and who made the good plays and him sitting there on his stool with the little stove burning and the dope boiling and bubbling and the needle waiting in his hand, looking at us with his eyes blinking and all run together behind his glasses so you couldn't even tell where the pupil was like you can in most eyes. And the niggers and the country folks that used to trade with him coming up and looking at the lock too, and asking us how he was and when he would come home and open up again. Because even after the store opened again, they would not trade with the clerk that Mrs. Merridew and Reverend

Schultz put in the store. Uncle Willy's sister said not to bother about the store, to let it stay shut because she would take care of Uncle Willy if he got well. But Mrs. Merridew said no, she not only aimed to cure Uncle Willy, she was going to give him a complete rebirth, not only into real Christianity but into the practical world too, with a place in it waiting for him so he could hold up his head not only with honor but pride too among his fellow men; she said that at first her only hope had been to fix it so he would not have to face his Maker slave body and soul to morphine, but now since his constitution was stronger than anybody could have believed, she was going to see that he assumed that position in the world which his family's name entitled him to before he degraded it.

She and Reverend Schultz found the clerk. He had been in Jefferson about six months. He had letters to the church, but nobody except Reverend Schultz and Mrs. Merridew knew anything about him. That is, they made him the clerk in Uncle Willy's store; nobody else knew anything about him at all. But Uncle Willy's old customers wouldn't trade with him. And we didn't either. Not that we had much trade to give him and we certainly didn't expect him to give us any ice cream and I don't reckon we would have taken it if he had offered it to us. Because it was not Uncle Willy, and pretty soon it wasn't even the same ice cream because the first thing the clerk did after he washed the windows was to fire old Job, only old Job refused to quit. He stayed around the store anyhow, mumbling to himself and the clerk would run him out the front door and old Job would go around to the back and come in and the clerk would find him again and cuss him, whispering, cussing old Job good even if he did have letters to the church; he went and swore out a warrant and the marshal told old Job he would have to stay out

of the store. Then old Job moved across the street. He would sit on the curb all day where he could watch the door and every time the clerk came in sight old Job would holler, "I ghy tell um! I ghy do hit!" So we even quit passing the store. We would cut across the corner not to pass it, with the windows clean now and the new town trade the clerk had built up—he had a lot of trade now—going in and out, just stopping long enough to ask old Job about Uncle Willy, even though we had already got what news came from Memphis about him every day and we knew that old Job would not know, would not be able to get it straight even if someone told him, since he never did believe that Uncle Willy was sick, he just believed that Mrs. Merri-dew had taken him away somewhere by main force and was holding him in another bed somewhere so he couldn't get up and come back home; and old Job sitting on the curb and blinking up at us with his little watery red eyes like Uncle Willy would and saying, "I ghy tell um! Holting him up dar whilst whipper-snappin' trash makin' free wid Marse Hoke Christian's sto. I ghy tell um!"

I V

UNCLE WILLY didn't die. One day he came home with his skin the color of tallow and weighing about ninety pounds now and with his eyes like broken eggs still but dead eggs, eggs that had been broken so long now that they didn't even smell dead any more—until you looked at them and saw that they were anything in the world except dead. That was after he got to know us again. I don't mean that he had forgotten about us exactly. It was like he still liked us as boys, only he had never seen us before and so he would have to learn our names and which faces the names belonged to. His sister had gone back to Texas now, because Mrs. Merri-

dew was going to look after him until he was completely recovered, completely cured. Yes. Cured.

I remember that first afternoon when he came to town and we walked into the store and Uncle Willy looked at the clean windows that you could see through now and at the town customers that never had traded with him, and at the clerk and said, "You're my clerk, hey?" and the clerk begun to talk about Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz and Uncle Willy said, "All right, all right," and now he ate some ice cream too, standing at the counter with us like he was a customer too and still looking around the store while he ate the ice cream, with those eyes that were not dead at all and he said, "Looks like you been getting more work out of my damned old nigger than I could," and the clerk began to say something else about Mrs. Merridew and Uncle Willy said, "All right, all right. Just get a holt of Job right away and tell him I am going to expect him to be here every day and that I want him to keep this store looking like this from now on." Then we went on behind the prescription case, with Uncle Willy looking around here too, at how the clerk had it neated up, with a big new lock on the cabinet where the drugs and such were kept, with those eyes that wouldn't anybody call dead, I don't care who he was, and said, "Step up there and tell that fellow I want my keys." But it wasn't the stove and the needle. Mrs. Merridew had busted both of them that day. But it wasn't that anyway, because the clerk came back and begun to talk about Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz, and Uncle Willy listening and saying, "All right, all right," and we never had seen him laugh before and his face didn't change now but we knew that he was laughing behind it. Then we went out. He turned sharp off the square, down Nigger Row to Sonny Barger's store and I took the money and bought the Jamaica ginger from Sonny and caught up with them and we went home with

Uncle Willy and we sat in the pasture while he drank the Jamaica ginger and practiced our names some more.

And that night we met him where he said. He had the wheelbarrow and the crowbar and we broke open the back door and then the cabinet with the new lock on it and got the can of alcohol and carried it to Uncle Willy's and buried it in the barn. It had almost three gallons in it and he didn't come to town at all for four weeks and he was sick again, and Mrs. Merridew storming into the house, jerking out drawers and flinging things out of closets and Uncle Willy lying in the bed and watching her with those eyes that were a long way from being dead. But she couldn't find anything because it was all gone now, and besides she didn't know what it was she was looking for because she was looking for a needle. And the night Uncle Willy was up again we took the crowbar and went back to the store and when we went to the cabinet we found that it was already open and Uncle Willy's stool sitting in the door and a quart bottle of alcohol on the stool in plain sight, and that was all. And then I knew that the clerk knew who got the alcohol before but I didn't know why he hadn't told Mrs. Merridew until two years later.

I didn't know that for two years, and Uncle Willy a year now going to Memphis every Saturday in the car his sister had given him. I wrote the letter with Uncle Willy looking over my shoulder and dictating, about how his health was improving but not as fast as the doctor seemed to want and that the doctor said he ought not to walk back and forth to the store and so a car, not an expensive car, just a small car that he could drive himself or maybe find a negro boy to drive for him if his sister thought he ought not to: and she sent the money and he got a burr-headed nigger boy about my size named Secretary to drive it for him. That is, Secretary said he could drive a car; certainly he and Uncle Willy

both learned on the night trips they would make back into the hill country to buy corn whisky and Secretary learned to drive in Memphis pretty quick, too, because they went every Saturday, returning Monday morning with Uncle Willy insensible on the back seat, with his clothes smelling of that smell whose source I was not to discover at first hand for some years yet, and two or three half-empty bottles and a little notebook full of telephone numbers and names like Lorine and Billie and Jack. I didn't know it for two years, not until that Monday morning when the sheriff came and padlocked and sealed what was left of Uncle Willy's stock and when they tried to find the clerk they couldn't even find out what train he had left town on; a hot morning in July and Uncle Willy sprawled out on the back seat, and on the front seat with Secretary a woman twice as big as Uncle Willy, in a red hat and a pink dress and a dirty white fur coat over the back of the seat and two straw suitcases on the fenders, with hair the color of a brand new brass hydrant bib and her cheeks streaked with mascara and caked powder where she had sweated.

It was worse than if he had started dope again. You would have thought he had brought smallpox to town. I remember how when Mrs. Merridew telephoned Mamma that afternoon you could hear her from away out at her house, over the wire, clean out to the back door and the kitchen: "Married! *Married!* Whore! Whore! *Whore!*" like the clerk used to cuss old Job, and so maybe the church can go just so far and maybe the folks that are in it are the ones that know the best or are entitled to say when to disconnect religion for a minute or two. And Papa was cussing too, not cussing anybody; I knew he was not cussing Uncle Willy or even Uncle Willy's new wife, just like I knew that I wished Mrs. Merridew could have been there to hear him. Only I reckon if she had been there she couldn't have heard anything be-

cause they said she still had on a house dress when she went and snatched Reverend Schultz into her car and went out to Uncle Willy's, where he was still in bed like always on Monday and Tuesday, and his new wife run Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz out of the house with the wedding license like it was a gun or a knife. And I remember how all that afternoon—Uncle Willy lived on a little quiet side street where the other houses were all little new ones that country people who had moved to town within the last fifteen years, like mail carriers and little storekeepers, lived—how all that afternoon mad-looking ladies with sun-bonnets on crooked came busting out of that little quiet street dragging the little children and the grown girls with them, heading for the mayor's office and Reverend Schultz's house, and how the young men and the boys that didn't work and some of the men that did would drive back and forth past Uncle Willy's house to look at her sitting on the porch smoking cigarettes and drinking something out of a glass; and how she came down town the next day to shop, in a black hat now and a red-and-white striped dress so that she looked like a great big stick of candy and three times as big as Uncle Willy now, walking along the street with men popping out of the stores when she passed like she was stepping on a line of spring triggers and both sides of her behind kind of pumping up and down inside the dress until somebody hollered, threw back his head and squalled: "YIPPEEE!" like that and she kind of twitched her behind without even stopping and then they hollered sure enough.

And the next day the wire came from his sister, and Papa for the lawyer and Mrs. Merridew for the witness went out there and Uncle Willy's wife showed them the license and told them to laugh that off, that Manuel Street or not she was married as good and tight as any high-nosed bitch in Jefferson or anywhere else and Papa saying, "Now, Mrs.

Merridew; now, Mrs. Christian," and he told Uncle Willy's wife how Uncle Willy was bankrupt now and might even lose the house too, and his wife said how about that sister in Texas, was Papa going to tell her that the oil business was bankrupt too and not to make her laugh. So they telegraphed the sister again and the thousand dollars came and they had to give Uncle Willy's wife the car too. She went back to Memphis that same afternoon, driving across the square with the straw suitcases, in a black lace dress now and already beginning to sweat again under her new makeup because it was still hot, and stopping where the men were waiting at the post office for the afternoon mail and she said, "Come on up to Manuel Street and see me sometime and I will show you hicks what you and this town can do to yourselves and one another."

And that afternoon Mrs. Merridew moved back into Uncle Willy's house and Papa said the letter she wrote Uncle Willy's sister had eleven pages to it because Papa said she would never forgive Uncle Willy for getting bankrupted. We could hear her from behind the hedge: "You're crazy, Mr. Christian; crazy. I have tried to save you and make something out of you besides a beast but now my patience is exhausted. I am going to give you one more chance. I am going to take you to Keeley and if that fails, I am going to take you myself to your sister and force her to commit you to an asylum." And the sister sent papers from Texas declaring that Uncle Willy was incompetent and making Mrs. Merridew his guardian and trustee, and Mrs. Merridew took him to the Keeley in Memphis. And that was all.

V

THAT IS, I reckon they thought that that was all, that this time Uncle Willy would surely die. Because even Papa

thought that he was crazy now because even Papa said that if it hadn't been for Uncle Willy I would not have run away, and therefore I didn't run away, I was tolled away by a lunatic; it wasn't Papa, it was Uncle Robert that said that he wasn't crazy because any man who could sell Jefferson real estate for cash while shut up in a Keeley institute wasn't crazy or even drunk. Because they didn't even know that he was out of Keeley, even Mrs. Merridew didn't know it until he was gone two days and they couldn't find him. They never did find him or find out how he got out and I didn't either until I got the letter from him to take the Memphis bus on a certain day and he would meet me at a stop on the edge of Memphis. I didn't even realize that I had not seen Secretary or old Job either in two weeks. But he didn't toll me away. I went because I wanted to, because he was the finest man I ever knew, because he had had fun all his life in spite of what they had tried to do to him or with him, and I hoped that maybe if I could stay with him a while I could learn how to, so I could still have fun too when I had to get old. Or maybe I knew more than that, without knowing it, like I knew that I would do anything he asked me to do, no matter what it was, just like I helped him break into the store for the alcohol when he took it for granted that I would without asking me to at all and then helped him hide it from Mrs. Merridew. Maybe I even knew what old Job was going to do. Not what he did do, but that he would do it if the occasion arose, and that this would have to be Uncle Willy's last go-round and if I wasn't there it would be just him against all the old terrified and timid clinging to dull and rule-ridden breathing which Jefferson was to him and which, even though he had escaped Jefferson, old Job still represented.

So I cut some grass that week and I had almost two dollars. I took the bus on the day he said and he was waiting for me

at the edge of town, in a Ford now without any top on it and you could still read the chalk letters, \$85 *cash* on the windshield, and a brand new tent folded up in the back of it and Uncle Willy and old Job in the front seat, and Uncle Willy looked fine with a checked cap new except for a big oil stain, with the bill turned round behind and a pair of goggles cocked up on the front of it and his celluloid collar freshly washed and no tie in it and his nose peeling with sunburn and his eyes bright behind his glasses. I would have gone with him anywhere; I would do it over again right now, knowing what was going to happen. He would not have to ask me now any more than he did then. So I got on top of the tent and we didn't go toward town, we went the other way. I asked where we were going but he just said wait, rushing the little car along like he couldn't get there quick enough himself, and I could tell from his voice that this was fine, this was the best yet, better than anybody else could have thought about doing, and old Job hunched down in the front seat, holding on with both hands and yelling at Uncle Willy about going so fast. Yes. Maybe I knew from old Job even then that Uncle Willy may have escaped Jefferson but he had just dodged it; he hadn't gotten away.

Then we came to the sign, the arrow that said Airport, and we turned and I said: "What? What is it?" but Uncle Willy just said: "Wait; just wait," like he couldn't hardly wait himself, hunched over the wheel with his white hair blowing under his cap and his collar riding up behind so you could see his neck between the collar and the shirt; and old Job saying (Oh yes, I could tell even then): "He got hit, all right. He done done hit. But I done tole him. Nemmine. I done warned him." Then we came to the airport and Uncle Willy stopped quick and pointed up without even getting out and said, "Look."

It was an airplane flying around and Uncle Willy running

up and down the edge of the field waving his handkerchief until it saw him and came down and landed and rolled up to us, a little airplane with a two-cylinder engine. It was Secretary, in another new checked cap and goggles like Uncle Willy's and they told me how Uncle Willy had bought one for old Job too but old Job wouldn't wear it. And that night—we stayed in a little tourist camp about two miles away and he had a cap and goggles all ready for me too; and then I knew why they hadn't been able to find him—Uncle Willy told me how he had bought the airplane with some of the money he had sold his house for after his sister saved it because she had been born in it too, but that Captain Bean at the airport wouldn't teach him to run it himself because he would need a permit from a doctor ("By God," Uncle Willy said, "damn if these Republicans and Democrats and XYZ's ain't going to have it soon where a man can't even flush the toilet in his own bathroom.") and he couldn't go to the doctor because the doctor might want to send him back to the Keeley or tell Mrs. Merridew where he was. So he just let Secretary learn to run it first and now Secretary had been running it for two weeks, which was almost fourteen days longer than he had practiced on the car before they started out with it. So Uncle Willy bought the car and tent and camping outfit yesterday and tomorrow we were going to start. We would go first to a place named Renfro where nobody knew us and where there was a big pasture that Uncle Willy had found out about and we would stay there a week while Secretary taught Uncle Willy to run the airplane. Then we would head west. When we ran out of the house money we would stop at a town and take up passengers and make enough to buy gasoline and food to get to the next town, Uncle Willy and Secretary in the airplane and me and old Job in the car; and old Job sitting in a chair against the wall, blinking at Uncle Willy with his little weak

red sullen eyes, and Uncle Willy reared up on the cot with his cap and goggles still on and his collar without any tie (it wasn't fastened to his shirt at all: just buttoned around his neck) sometimes sideways and sometimes even backward like an Episcopal minister's, and his eyes bright behind his glasses and his voice bright and fine. "And by Christmas we will be in California!" he said. "Think of that. California!"

VI

So how could they say that I had to be tolled away? How could they? I suppose I knew then that it wouldn't work, couldn't work, that it was too fine to be true. I reckon I even knew how it was going to end just from the glum way Secretary acted whenever Uncle Willy talked about learning to run the airplane himself, just as I knew from the way old Job looked at Uncle Willy, not what he did of course, but what he would do if the occasion arose. Because I was the other white one. I was white, even if old Job and Secretary were both older than me, so it would be all right; I could do it all right. It was like I knew even then that, no matter what might happen to him, he wouldn't ever die and I thought that if I could just learn to live like he lived, no matter what might happen to me I wouldn't ever die either.

So we left the next morning, just after daylight because there was another fool rule that Secretary would have to stay in sight of the field until they gave him a license to go away. We filled the airplane with gas and Secretary went up in it just like he was going up to practice. Then Uncle Willy got us into the car quick because he said the airplane could make sixty miles an hour and so Secretary would be at Renfro a long while before we got there. But when we got to Renfro Secretary wasn't there and we put the tent up and ate dinner and he still didn't come and Uncle Willy

beginning to cuss and we ate supper and dark came but Secretary didn't and Uncle Willy was cussing good now. He didn't come until the next day. We heard him and ran out and watched him fly right over us, coming from the opposite direction of Memphis, going fast and us all hollering and waving. But he went on, with Uncle Willy jumping up and down and cussing, and we were loading the tent into the car to try to catch him when he came back. We didn't hear him at all now and we could see the propeller because it wasn't running and it looked like Secretary wasn't even going to light in the pasture but he was going to light in some trees on the edge of it. But he skinned by them and kind of bumped down and we ran up and found him still sitting in the airplane with his eyes closed and his face the color of wood ashes and he said, "Captin, will you please tell me where to find Ren—" before he even opened his eyes to see who we were. He said he had landed seven times yesterday and it wouldn't be Renfro and they would tell him how to get to Renfro and he would go there and that wouldn't be Renfro either and he had slept in the airplane last night and he hadn't eaten since we left Memphis because he had spent the three dollars Uncle Willy gave him for gasoline and if he hadn't run out of gas when he did he wouldn't never have found us.

Uncle Willy wanted me to go to town and get some more gas so he could start learning to run it right away but Secretary wouldn't. He just refused. He said the airplane belonged to Uncle Willy and he reckoned he belonged to Uncle Willy too, leastways until he got back home, but that he had flown all he could stand for a while. So Uncle Willy started the next morning.

I thought for a while that I would have to throw old Job down and hold him and him hollering, "Don't you git in dat thing!" and still hollering, "I ghy tell um! I ghy tell um!"

while we watched the airplane with Secretary and Uncle Willy in it kind of jump into the air and then duck down like Uncle Willy was trying to take the short cut to China and then duck up again and get to going pretty straight at last and fly around the pasture and then turn down to land, and every day old Job hollering at Uncle Willy and field hands coming up out of the fields and folks in wagons and walking stopping in the road to watch them and the airplane coming down, passing us with Uncle Willy and Secretary side by side and looking exactly alike, I don't mean in the face but exactly alike like two tines of a garden fork look exactly like just before they chop into the ground; we could see Secretary's eyes and his mouth run out so you could almost hear him saying, "Hoooooooooooo!" and Uncle Willy's glasses shining and his hair blowing from under his cap and his celluloid collar that he washed every night before he went to bed and no tie in it and they would go by, fast, and old Job hollering, "You git outer dar! You git outer dat thing!" and we could hear Secretary too: "Turn hit loose, Unker Willy! Turn hit *loose*!" and the airplane would go on, ducking up one second and down the next and with one wing higher than the other one second and lower the next and then it would be traveling sideways and maybe it would hit the ground sideways the first time, with a kind of crashing sound and the dust spurting up and then bounce off again and Secretary hollering, "Unker Willy! *Turn loose*!" and at night in the tent Uncle Willy's eyes would still be shining and he would be too excited to stop talking and go to sleep and I don't believe he even remembered that he had not taken a drink since he first thought about buying the airplane.

Oh yes, I know what they said about me after it was all over, what Papa said when he and Mrs. Merridew got there that morning, about me being the white one, almost a man,

and Secretary and old Job just irresponsible niggers, yet it was old Job and Secretary who tried to prevent him. Because that was it; that was what they couldn't understand.

I remember the last night and Secretary and old Job both working on him, when old Job finally made Secretary tell Uncle Willy that he would never learn to fly, and Uncle Willy stopped talking and stood up and looked at Secretary. "Didn't you learn to run it in two weeks?" he said. Secretary said yes. "You, a damn, trifling, worthless, ignorant, burr-headed nigger?" and Secretary said yes. "And me that graduated from a university and ran a fifteen-thousand-dollar business for forty years, yet you tell me I can't learn to run a damn little fifteen-hundred-dollar airplane?" Then he looked at me. "Don't you believe I can run it?" he said. And I looked at him and I said, "Yes. I believe you can do anything."

VII

AND NOW I can't tell them. I can't say it. Papa told me once that somebody said that if you know it you can say it. Or maybe the man that said that didn't count fourteen-year-old boys. Because I must have known it was going to happen. And Uncle Willy must have known it too, known that the moment would come. It was like we both had known it and we didn't even have to compare notes, tell one another that we did: he not needing to say that day in Memphis, "Come with me so you will be there when I will need you," and me not needing to say, "Let me come so I can be there when you will."

Because old Job telephoned Mrs. Merridew. He waited until we were asleep and slipped out and walked all the way to town and telephoned her; he didn't have any money and he probably never telephoned in his life before, yet he tele-

phoned her and the next morning he came up running in the dew (the town, the telephone, was five miles away) just as Secretary was getting the engine started and I knew what he had done even before he got close enough to holler, running and stumbling along slow across the pasture, hollering, "Holt um! Holt um! Dey'll be here any minute! Jest holt um ten minutes en dey'll be here," and I knew and I ran and met him and now I did hold him and him fighting and hitting at me and still hollering at Uncle Willy in the airplane. "You telephoned?" I said. "Her? *Her*? Told her where he is?"

"Yes," Uncle Job hollered. "En she say she gonter git yo pappy and start right away and be here by six o'clock," and me holding him; he felt like a handful of scrawny dried sticks and I could hear his lungs wheezing and I could feel his heart, and Secretary came up running too and old Job begun to holler at Secretary, "Git him outer dar! Dey comin! Dey be here any minute if you can jest holt um!" and Secretary saying, "Which? Which?" and old Job hollered at him to run and hold the airplane and Secretary turned and I tried to grab his leg but I couldn't and I could see Uncle Willy looking toward us and Secretary running toward the airplane and I got onto my knees and waved and I was hollering too. I don't reckon Uncle Willy could hear me for the engine. But I tell you he didn't need to, because we knew, we both knew; and so I knelt there and held old Job on the ground and we saw the airplane start, with Secretary still running after it, and jump into the air and duck down and then jump up again and then it looked like it had stopped high in the air above the trees where we thought Secretary was fixing to land that first day before it ducked down beyond them and went out of sight and Secretary was already running and so it was only me and Uncle Job that had to get up and start.

Oh, yes, I know what they said about me; I knew it all that afternoon while we were going home with the hearse in front

and Secretary and old Job in the Ford next and Papa and me in our car coming last and Jefferson getting nearer and nearer; and then all of a sudden I began to cry. Because the dying wasn't anything, it just touched the outside of you that you wore around with you for comfort and convenience like you do your clothes: it was because the old garments, the clothes that were not worth anything had betrayed one of the two of us and the one betrayed was me, and Papa with his other arm around my shoulders now, saying, "Now, now; I didn't mean that. You didn't do it. Nobody blames you."

You see? That was it. I did help Uncle Willy. He knows I did. He knows he couldn't have done it without me. He knows I did; we didn't even have to look at one another when he went. That's it.

And now they will never understand, not even Papa, and there is only me to try to tell them and how can I ever tell them, and make them understand? How can I?

Mule in the Yard

IT WAS a gray day in late January, though not cold because of the fog. Old Het, just walked in from the poorhouse, ran down the 'hall toward the kitchen, shouting in a strong, bright, happy voice. She was about seventy probably, though by her own counting, calculated from the ages of various housewives in the town from brides to grandmothers whom she claimed to have nursed in infancy, she would have to be around a hundred and at least triplets. Tall, lean, fog-beaded, in tennis shoes and a long rat-colored cloak trimmed with what forty or fifty years ago had been fur, a modish though not new purple toque set upon her headrag and carrying (time was when she made her weekly rounds from kitchen to kitchen carrying a brocaded carpetbag though since the advent of the ten-cent stores the carpetbag became an endless succession of the convenient paper receptacles with which they supply their customers for a few cents) the shopping-bag, she ran into the kitchen and shouted with strong and childlike pleasure: "Miss Mannie! Mule in de yard!"

Mrs. Hait, stooping to the stove, in the act of drawing from it a scuttle of live ashes, jerked upright; clutching the scuttle, she glared at old Het, then she too spoke at once, strong too, immediate. "Them sons of bitches," she said. She left the kitchen, not running exactly, yet with a kind of outraged celerity, carrying the scuttle—a compact woman of

forty-odd, with an air of indomitable yet relieved bereavement, as though that which had relicted her had been a woman and a not particularly valuable one at that. She wore a calico wrapper and a sweater coat, and a man's felt hat which they in the town knew had belonged to her ten years' dead husband. But the man's shoes had not belonged to him. They were high shoes which buttoned, with toes like small tulip bulbs, and in the town they knew that she had bought them new for herself. She and old Het ran down the kitchen steps and into the fog. That's why it was not cold: as though there lay supine and prisoned between earth and mist the long winter night's suspiration of the sleeping town in dark, close rooms—the slumber and the rousing; the stale waking thermostatic, by re-heating heat-engendered: it lay like a scum of cold grease upon the steps and the wooden entrance to the basement and upon the narrow plank walk which led to a shed building in the corner of the yard: upon these planks, running and still carrying the scuttle of live ashes, Mrs. Hait skated viciously.

"Watch out!" old Het, footed securely by her rubber soles, cried happily. "Dey in de front!" Mrs. Hait did not fall. She did not even pause. She took in the immediate scene with one cold glare and was running again when there appeared at the corner of the house and apparently having been born before their eyes of the fog itself, a mule. It looked taller than a giraffe. Longheaded, with a flying halter about its scissorlike ears, it rushed down upon them with violent and apparitionlike suddenness.

"Dar hit!" old Het cried, waving the shopping-bag. "Hoo!" Mrs. Hait whirled. Again she skidded savagely on the greasy planks as she and the mule rushed parallel with one another toward the shed building, from whose open doorway there now projected the static and astonished face of a cow. To the cow the fog-born mule doubtless looked

taller and more incredibly sudden than a giraffe even, and apparently bent upon charging right through the shed as though it were made of straw or were purely and simply mirage. The cow's head likewise had a quality transient and abrupt and unmundane. It vanished, sucked into invisibility like a match flame, though the mind knew and the reason insisted that she had withdrawn into the shed, from which, as proof's burden, there came an indescribable sound of shock and alarm by shed and beast engendered, analogous to a single note from a profoundly struck lyre or harp. Toward this sound Mrs. Hait sprang, immediately, as if by pure reflex, as though in invulnerable compact of female with female against a world of mule and man. She and the mule converged upon the shed at top speed, the heavy scuttle poised lightly in her hand to hurl. Of course it did not take this long, and likewise it was the mule which refused the gambit. Old Het was still shouting "Dar hit! Dar hit!" when it swerved and rushed at her where she stood tall as a stove pipe, holding the shopping-bag which she swung at the beast as it rushed past her and vanished beyond the other corner of the house as though sucked back into the fog which had produced it, profound and instantaneous and without any sound.

With that unhasteful celerity Mrs. Hait turned and set the scuttle down on the brick coping of the cellar entrance and she and old Het turned the corner of the house in time to see the now wraithlike mule at the moment when its course converged with that of a choleric-looking rooster and eight Rhode Island Red hens emerging from beneath the house. Then for an instant its progress assumed the appearance and trappings of an apotheosis: hell-born and hell-returning, in the act of dissolving completely into the fog, it seemed to rise vanishing into a sunless and dimensionless medium borne upon and enclosed by small winged goblins.

"Dey's mo in de front!" old Het cried.

"Them sons of bitches," Mrs. Hait said, again in that grim, prescient voice without rancor or heat. It was not the mules to which she referred; it was not even the owner of them. It was her whole town-dwelling history as dated from that April dawn ten years ago when what was left of Hait had been gathered from the mangled remains of five mules and several feet of new Manila rope on a blind curve of the railroad just out of town; the geographical hap of her very home; the very components of her bereavement—the mules, the defunct husband, and the owner of them. His name was Snopes; in the town they knew about him too—how he bought his stock at the Memphis market and brought it to Jefferson and sold it to farmers and widows and orphans black and white, for whatever he could contrive—down to a certain figure; and about how (usually in the dead season of winter) teams and even small droves of his stock would escape from the fenced pasture where he kept them and, tied one to another with sometimes quite new hemp rope (and which item Snopes included in the subsequent claim), would be annihilated by freight trains on the same blind curve which was to be the scene of Hait's exit from this world; once a town wag sent him through the mail a printed train schedule for the division. A squat, pasty man perennially tieless and with a strained, harried expression, at stated intervals he passed athwart the peaceful and somnolent life of the town in dust and uproar, his advent heralded by shouts and cries, his passing marked by a yellow cloud filled with tossing jug-shaped heads and clattering hooves and the same forlorn and earnest cries of the drovers; and last of all and well back out of the dust, Snopes himself moving at a harried and panting trot, since it was said in the town that he was deathly afraid of the very beasts in which he cleverly dealt.

The path which he must follow from the railroad station

to his pasture crossed the edge of town near Hait's home; Hait and Mrs. Hait had not been in the house a week before they waked one morning to find it surrounded by galloping mules and the air filled with the shouts and cries of the drovers. But it was not until that April dawn some years later, when those who reached the scene first found what might be termed foreign matter among the mangled mules and the savage fragments of new rope, that the town suspected that Hait stood in any closer relationship to Snopes and the mules than that of helping at periodical intervals to drive them out of his front yard. After that they believed that they knew; in a three days' recess of interest, surprise, and curiosity they watched to see if Snopes would try to collect on Hait also.

But they learned only that the adjuster appeared and called upon Mrs. Hait and that a few days later she cashed a check for eight thousand five hundred dollars, since this was back in the old halcyon days when even the companies considered their southern branches and divisions the legitimate prey of all who dwelt beside them. She took the cash: she stood in her sweater coat and the hat which Hait had been wearing on the fatal morning a week ago and listened in cold, grim silence while the teller counted the money and the president and the cashier tried to explain to her the virtues of a bond, then of a savings account, then of a checking account, and departed with the money in a salt sack under her apron; after a time she painted her house: that serviceable and time-defying color which the railroad station was painted, as though out of sentiment or (as some said) gratitude.

The adjuster also summoned Snopes into conference, from which he emerged not only more harried-looking than ever, but with his face stamped with a bewildered dismay which it was to wear from then on, and that was the last time his pasture fence was ever to give inexplicably away at dead of night upon mules coupled in threes and fours by adequate

rope even though not always new. And then it seemed as though the mules themselves knew this, as if, even while haltered at the Memphis block at his bid, they sensed it somehow as they sensed that he was afraid of them. Now, three or four times a year and as though by fiendish concord and as soon as they were freed of the box car, the entire uproar—the dust cloud filled with shouts earnest, harried, and dismayed, with plunging demoniac shapes—would become translated in a single burst of perverse and uncontrollable violence, without any intervening contact with time, space, or earth, across the peaceful and astonished town and into Mrs. Hait's yard, where, in a certain hapless despair which abrogated for the moment even physical fear, Snopes ducked and dodged among the thundering shapes about the house (for whose very impervious paint the town believed that he felt he had paid and whose inmate lived within it a life of idle and queen-like ease on money which he considered at least partly his own) while gradually that section and neighborhood gathered to look on from behind adjacent window curtains and porches screened and not, and from the sidewalks and even from halted wagons and cars in the street—housewives in the wrappers and boudoir caps of morning, children on the way to school, casual Negroes and casual whites in static and entertained repose.

They were all there when, followed by old Het and carrying the stub of a worn-out broom, Mrs. Hait ran around the next corner and onto the handkerchief-sized plot of earth which she called her front yard. It was small; any creature with a running stride of three feet could have spanned it in two paces, yet at the moment, due perhaps to the myopic and distortive quality of the fog, it seemed to be as incredibly full of mad life as a drop of water beneath the microscope. Yet again she did not falter. With the broom clutched in her hand and apparently with a kind of sublime faith in her own

invulnerability, she rushed on after the haltered mule which was still in that arrested and wraithlike process of vanishing furiously into the fog, its wake indicated by the tossing and dispersing shapes of the nine chickens like so many jagged scraps of paper in the dying air blast of an automobile, and the madly dodging figure of a man. The man was Snopes; beaded too with moisture, his wild face gaped with hoarse shouting and the two heavy lines of shaven beard descending from the corners of it as though in alluvial retrospect of years of tobacco, he screamed at her: "Fore God, Miz Hait! I done everything I could!" She didn't even look at him.

"Ketch that big un with the bridle on," she said in her cold, panting voice. "Git that big un outen here."

"Sho!" Snopes shrieked. "Jest let um take their time. Jest don't git um excited now."

"Watch out!" old Het shouted. "He headin fer de back again!"

"Git the rope," Mrs. Hait said, running again. Snopes glared back at old Het.

"Fore God, where is ere rope?" he shouted.

"In de cellar fo God!" old Het shouted, also without pausing. "Go roun de udder way en head um." Again she and Mrs. Hait turned the corner in time to see again the still-vanishing mule with the halter once more in the act of floating lightly onward in its cloud of chickens with which, they being able to pass under the house and so on the chord of a circle while it had to go around on the arc, it had once more coincided. When they turned the next corner they were in the back yard again.

"Fo God!" old Het cried. "He fixin to misuse de cow!" For they had gained on the mule now, since it had stopped. In fact, they came around the corner on a tableau. The cow now stood in the centre of the yard. She and the mule faced one another a few feet apart. Motionless, with lowered heads

and braced forelegs, they looked like two book ends from two distinct pairs of a general pattern which some one of amateurly bucolic leanings might have purchased, and which some child had salvaged, brought into idle juxtaposition and then forgotten; and, his head and shoulders projecting above the back-flung slant of the cellar entrance where the scuttle still sat, Snopes standing as though buried to the armpits for a Spanish-Indian-American suttee. Only again it did not take this long. It was less than tableau; it was one of those things which later even memory cannot quite affirm. Now and in turn, man and cow and mule vanished beyond the next corner, Snopes now in the lead, carrying the rope, the cow next with her tail rigid and raked slightly like the stern staff of a boat. Mrs. Hait and old Het ran on, passing the open cellar gaping upon its accumulation of human necessities and widowed womanyears—boxes for kindling wood, old papers and magazines, the broken and outworn furniture and utensils which no woman ever throws away; a pile of coal and another of pitch pine for priming fires—and ran on and turned the next corner to see man and cow and mule all vanishing now in the wild cloud of ubiquitous chickens which had once more crossed beneath the house and emerged. They ran on, Mrs. Hait in grim and unflagging silence, old Het with the eager and happy amazement of a child. But when they gained the front again they saw only Snopes. He lay flat on his stomach, his head and shoulders upreared by his outstretched arms, his coat tail swept forward by its own arrested momentum about his head so that from beneath it his slack-jawed face mused in wild repose like that of a burlesqued nun.

"Whar'd dey go?" old Het shouted at him. He didn't answer.

"Dey tightenin' on de curves!" she cried. "Dey already in de back again!" That's where they were. The cow made a feint at running into her shed, but deciding perhaps that her

speed was too great, she whirled in a final desperation of despair-like valor. But they did not see this, nor see the mule, swerving to pass her, crash and blunder for an instant at the open cellar door before going on. When they arrived, the mule was gone. The scuttle was gone too, but they did not notice it; they saw only the cow standing in the centre of the yard as before, panting, rigid, with braced forelegs and lowered head facing nothing, as if the child had returned and removed one of the book ends for some newer purpose or game. They ran on. Mrs. Hait ran heavily now, her mouth too open, her face putty-colored and one hand pressed to her side. So slow was their progress that the mule in its third circuit of the house overtook them from behind and soared past with undiminished speed, with brief demon thunder and a keen ammonia-sweet reek of sweat sudden and sharp as a jeering cry, and was gone. Yet they ran doggedly on around the next corner in time to see it succeed at last in vanishing into the fog; they heard its hoofs, brief, staccato, and derisive, on the paved street, dying away.

"Well!" old Het said, stopping. She panted, happily. "Gentlemen, hush! Ain't we had—" Then she became stone still; slowly her head turned, high-nosed, her nostrils pulsing; perhaps for the instant she saw the open cellar door as they had last passed it, with no scuttle beside it. "Fo God I smells smoke!" she said. "Chile, run, git yo money."

That was still early, not yet ten o'clock. By noon the house had burned to the ground. There was a farmers' supply store where Snopes could be usually found; more than one had made a point of finding him there by that time. They told him about how when the fire engine and the crowd reached the scene, Mrs. Hait, followed by old Het carrying her shopping-bag in one hand and a framed portrait of Mr. Hait in the other, emerged with an umbrella and wearing a new, dun-colored, mail-order coat, in one pocket of which

lay a fruit jar filled with smoothly rolled banknotes and in the other a heavy, nickel-plated pistol, and crossed the street to the house opposite, where with old Het beside her in another rocker, she had been sitting ever since on the veranda, grim, inscrutable, the two of them rocking steadily, while hoarse and tireless men hurled her dishes and furniture and bedding up and down the street.

"What are you telling me for?" Snopes said. "Hit warn't me that set that ere scuttle of live fire where the first thing that passed would knock hit into the cellar."

"It was you that opened the cellar door, though."

"Sho. And for what? To git that rope, her own rope, where she told me to git it."

"To catch your mule with, that was trespassing on her property. You can't get out of it this time, I. O. There ain't a jury in the county that won't find for her."

"Yes. I reckon not. And just because she is a woman. That's why. Because she is a durn woman. All right. Let her go to her durn jury with hit. I can talk too; I reckon hit's a few things I could tell a jury myself about—" He ceased. They were watching him.

"What? Tell a jury about what?"

"Nothing. Because hit ain't going to no jury. A jury between her and me? Me and Mannie Hait? You boys don't know her if you think she's going to make trouble over a pure acci-dent couldn't nobody help. Why, there ain't a fairer, finer woman in the county than Miz Mannie Hait. I just wisht I had a opportunity to tell her so." The opportunity came at once. Old Het was behind her, carrying the shopping-bag. Mrs. Hait looked once, quietly, about at the faces, making no response to the murmur of curious salutation, then not again. She didn't look at Snopes long either, nor talk to him long.

"I come to buy that mule," she said.

"What mule?" They looked at one another. "You'd like to own that mule?" She looked at him. "Hit'll cost you a hundred and fifty, Miz Mannie."

"You mean dollars?"

"I don't mean dimes nor nickels neither, Miz Mannie."

"Dollars," she said. "That's more than mules was in Hait's time."

"Lots of things is different since Hait's time. Including you and me."

"I reckon so," she said. Then she went away. She turned without a word, old Het following.

"Maybe one of them others you looked at this morning would suit you," Snopes said. She didn't answer. Then they were gone.

"I don't know as I would have said that last to her," one said.

"What for?" Snopes said. "If she was aiming to law something outen me about that fire, you reckon she would have come and offered to pay me money for hit?" That was about one o'clock. About four o'clock he was shouldering his way through a throng of Negroes before a cheap grocery store when one called his name. It was old Het, the now bulging shopping-bag on her arm, eating bananas from a paper sack.

"Fo God I wuz jest dis minute huntin fer you," she said. She handed the banana to a woman beside her and delved and fumbled in the shopping-bag and extended a greenback. "Miz Mannie gimme dis to give you; I wuz jest on de way to de sto whar you stay at. Here." He took the bill.

"What's this? From Miz Hait?"

"Fer de mule." The bill was for ten dollars. "You don't need to gimme no receipt. I kin be de witness I give hit to you."

"Ten dollars? For that mule? I told her a hundred and fifty dollars."

"You'll have to fix dat up wid her yo'self. She jest gimme dis to give ter you when she sot out to fetch de mule."

"Set out to fetch— She went out there herself and taken my mule outen my pasture?"

"Lawd, chile," old Het said, "Miz Mannie ain't skeered of no mulc. Ain't you done foun dat out?"

And then it became late, what with the yet short winter days; when she came in sight of the two gaunt chimneys against the sunset, evening was already finding itself. But she could smell the ham cooking before she came in sight of the cow shed even, though she could not see it until she came around in front where the fire burned beneath an iron skillet set on bricks and where nearby Mrs. Hait was milking the cow. "Well," old Het said, "you is settled down, ain't you?" She looked into the shed; neated and raked and swept even, and floored now with fresh hay. A clean new lantern burned on a box, beside it a pallet bed was spread neatly on the straw and turned neatly back for the night. "Why, you is fixed up," she said with pleased astonishment. Within the door was a kitchen chair. She drew it out and sat down beside the skillet and laid the bulging shopping-bag beside her.

"I'll tend dis meat whilst you milks. I'd offer to strip dat cow fer you ef I wuzn't so wo out wid all dis excitement we been had." She looked around her. "I don't believe I sees yo new mule, dough." Mrs. Hait grunted, her head against the cow's flank. After a moment she said,

"Did you give him that money?"

"I give um ter him. He ack surprise at first, lak maybe he think you didn't aim to trade dat quick. I tole him to settle de details wid you later. He taken de money, dough. So I reckon dat's offen his mine en yo'n bofe." Again Mrs. Hait grunted. Old Het turned the ham in the skillet. Beside it the coffee pot bubbled and steamed. "Cawfee smell good too," she said. "I ain't had no appetite in years now. A bird couldn't live on de vittles I eats. But jest lemme git a whiff er cawfee en seem lak

hit always whets me a little. Now, ef you jest had nudder little piece o dis ham, now— Fo God, you got company aready.” But Mrs. Hait did not even look up until she had finished. Then she turned without rising from the box on which she sat.

“I reckon you and me better have a little talk,” Snopes said. “I reckon I got something that belongs to you and I hear you got something that belongs to me.” He looked about, quickly, ceaselessly, while old Het watched him. He turned to her. “You go away, aunty. I don’t reckon you want to set here and listen to us.”

“Lawd, honey,” old Het said. “Don’t you mind me. I done already had so much troubles myself dat I kin set en listen to udder folks’ widout hit worryin me a-tall. You gawn talk whut you came ter talk; I jest set here en tend de ham.” Snopes looked at Mrs. Hait.

“Ain’t you going to make her go away?” he said.

“What for?” Mrs. Hait said. “I reckon she ain’t the first critter that ever come on this yard when hit wanted and went or stayed when hit liked.” Snopes made a gesture, brief, fretted, restrained.

“Well,” he said. “All right. So you taken the mule.”

“I paid you for it. She give you the money.”

“Ten dollars. For a hundred-and-fifty-dollar mule. Ten dollars.”

“I don’t know anything about hundred-and-fifty-dollar mules. All I know is what the railroad paid.” Now Snopes looked at her for a full moment.

“What do you mean?”

“Them sixty dollars a head the railroad used to pay you for mules back when you and Hait——”

“Hush,” Snopes said; he looked about again, quick, ceaseless. “All right. Even call it sixty dollars. But you just sent me ten.”

“Yes. I sent you the difference.” He looked at her, per-

fectly still. "Between that mule and what you owed Hait."

"What I owed——"

"For getting them five mules onto the tr——"

"Hush!" he cried. "Hush!" Her voice went on, cold, grim, level.

"For helping you. You paid him fifty dollars each time, and the railroad paid you sixty dollars a head for the mules. Ain't that right?" He watched her. "The last time you never paid him. So I taken that mule instead. And I sent you the ten dollars difference."

"Yes," he said in a tone of quiet, swift, profound bemusement; then he cried: "But look! Here's where I got you. Hit was our agreement that I wouldn't never owe him nothing until after the mules was——"

"I reckon you better hush yourself," Mrs. Hait said.

"—until hit was over. And this time, when over had come, I never owed nobody no money because the man hit would have been owed to wasn't nobody," he cried triumphantly. "You see?" Sitting on the box, motionless, downlooking, Mrs. Hait seemed to muse. "So you just take your ten dollars back and tell me where my mule is and we'll just go back good friends to where we started at. Fore God, I'm as sorry as ere a living man about that fire——"

"Fo God!" old Het said, "hit was a blaze, wuzn't it?"

"—but likely with all that ere railroad money you still got, you just been wanting a chance to build new, all along. So here. Take hit." He put the money into her hand. "Where's my mule?" But Mrs. Hait didn't move at once.

"You want to give it back to me?" she said.

"Sho. We been friends all the time; now we'll just go back to where we left off being. I don't hold no hard feelings and don't you hold none. Where you got the mule hid?"

"Up at the end of that ravine ditch behind Spilmer's," she said.

"Sho. I know. A good, sheltered place, since you ain't got nere barn. Only if you'd a just left hit in the pasture, hit would a saved us both trouble. But hit ain't no hard feelings though. And so I'll bid you goodnight. You're all fixed up, I see. I reckon you could save some more money by not building no house a-tall."

"I reckon I could," Mrs. Hait said. But he was gone.

"Whut did you leave de mule dar fer?" old Het said.

"I reckon that's far enough," Mrs. Hait said.

"Fer enough?" But Mrs. Hait came and looked into the skillet, and old Het said, "Wuz hit me er you dat mentioned something erbout er nudder piece o dis ham?" So they were both eating when in the not-quite-yet accomplished twilight Snopes returned. He came up quietly and stood, holding his hands to the blaze as if he were quite cold. He did not look at any one now.

"I reckon I'll take that ere ten dollars," he said.

"What ten dollars?" Mrs. Hait said. He seemed to muse upon the fire. Mrs. Hait and old Het chewed quietly, old Het alone watching him.

"You ain't going to give hit back to me?" he said.

"You was the one that said to let's go back to where we started," Mrs. Hait said.

"Fo God you wuz, en dat's de fack," old Het said. Snopes mused upon the fire; he spoke in a tone of musing and amazed despair:

"I go to the worry and the risk and the agoment for years and years and I get sixty dollars. And you, one time, without no trouble and no risk, without even knowing you are going to git it, git eighty-five hundred dollars. I never begrudged hit to you; can't nere a man say I did, even if hit did seem a little strange that you should git it all when he wasn't working for you and you never even knowed where he was at and what doing; that all you done to git it was to be married to

him. And now, after all these ten years of not begrudging you hit, you taken the best mule I had and you ain't even going to pay me ten dollars for hit. Hit ain't right. Hit ain't justice."

"You got de mule back, en you ain't satisfried yit," old Het said. "Whut does you want?" Now Snopes looked at Mrs. Hait.

"For the last time I ask hit," he said. "Will you or won't you give hit back?"

"Give what back?" Mrs. Hait said. Snopes turned. He stumbled over something—it was old Het's shopping-bag—and recovered and went on. They could see him in silhouette, as though framed by the two blackened chimneys against the dying west; they saw him fling up both clenched hands in a gesture almost Gallic, of resignation and impotent despair. Then he was gone. Old Het was watching Mrs. Hait.

"Honey," she said. "Whut did you do wid de mule?" Mrs. Hait leaned forward to the fire. On her plate lay a stale biscuit. She lifted the skillet and poured over the biscuit the grease in which the ham had cooked.

"I shot it," she said.

"You which?" old Het said. Mrs. Hait began to eat the biscuit. "Well," old Het said, happily, "de mule burnt de house en you shot de mule. Dat's whut I calls justice." It was getting dark fast now, and before her was still the three-mile walk to the poorhouse. But the dark would last a long time in January, and the poorhouse too would not move at once. She sighed with weary and happy relaxation. "Gentlemen, hush! Ain't we had a day!"

That Will Be Fine

I

WE COULD HEAR the water running into the tub. We looked at the presents scattered over the bed where mamma had wrapped them in the colored paper, with our names on them so Grandpa could tell who they belonged to easy when he would take them off the tree. There was a present for everybody except Grandpa because mamma said that Grandpa is too old to get presents any more.

"This one is yours," I said.

"Sho now," Rosie said. "You come on and get in that tub like your mamma tell you."

"I know what's in it," I said. "I could tell you if I wanted to."

Rosie looked at her present. "I reckon I kin wait twell hit be handed to me at the right time," she said.

"I'll tell you what's in it for a nickel," I said.

Rosie looked at her present. "I ain't got no nickel," she said. "But I will have Christmas morning when Mr. Rodney give me that dime."

"You'll know what's in it anyway then and you won't pay me," I said. "Go and ask mamma to lend you a nickel."

Then Rosie grabbed me by the arm. "You come on and get in that tub," she said. "You and money! If you ain't rich time you twenty-one, hit will be because the law done abolished money or done abolished you."

So I went and bathed and came back, with the presents all scattered out across mamma's and papa's bed and you could almost smell it and tomorrow night they would begin to shoot the fireworks and then you could hear it too. It would be just tonight and then tomorrow we would get on the train, except papa, because he would have to stay at the livery stable until after Christmas Eve, and go to Grandpa's, and then tomorrow night and then it would be Christmas and Grandpa would take the presents off the tree and call out our names, and the one from me to Uncle Rodney that I bought with my own dime and so after a while Uncle Rodney would prize open Grandpa's desk and take a dose of Grandpa's tonic and maybe he would give me another quarter for helping him, like he did last Christmas, instead of just a nickel, like he would do last summer while he was visiting mamma and us and we were doing business with Mrs. Tucker before Uncle Rodney went home and began to work for the Compress Association, and it would be fine. Or maybe even a half a dollar and it seemed to me like I just couldn't wait.

"Jesus, I can't hardly wait," I said.

"You which?" Rosie hollered. "Jesus?" she hollered. "Jesus? You let your mamma hear you cussing and I bound you'll wait. You talk to me about a nickel! For a nickel I'd tell her just what you said."

"If you'll pay me a nickel I'll tell her myself," I said.

"Get into that bed!" Rosie hollered. "A seven-year-old boy, cussing!"

"If you will promise not to tell her, I'll tell you what's in your present and you can pay me the nickel Christmas morning," I said.

"Get in that bed!" Rosie hollered. "You and your nickel! I bound if I thought any of you all was fixing to buy even a dime present for your grandpa, I'd put in a nickel of hit myself."

"Grandpa don't want presents," I said. "He's too old."

"Hah," Rosie said. "Too old, is he? Suppose everybody decided you was too young to have nickels: what would you think about that? Hah?"

So Rosie turned out the light and went out. But I could still see the presents by the firelight: the ones for Uncle Rodney and Grandma and Aunt Louisa and Aunt Louisa's husband Uncle Fred, and Cousin Louisa and Cousin Fred and the baby and Grandpa's cook and our cook, that was Rosie, and maybe somebody ought to give Grandpa a present only maybe it ought to be Aunt Louisa because she and Uncle Fred lived with Grandpa, or maybe Uncle Rodney ought to because he lived with Grandpa too. Uncle Rodney always gave mamma and papa a present but maybe it would be just a waste of his time and Grandpa's time both for Uncle Rodney to give Grandpa a present, because one time I asked mamma why Grandpa always looked at the present Uncle Rodney gave her and papa and got so mad, and papa began to laugh and mamma said papa ought to be ashamed, that it wasn't Uncle Rodney's fault if his generosity was longer than his pocket book, and papa said Yes, it certainly wasn't Uncle Rodney's fault, he never knew a man to try harder to get money than Uncle Rodney did, that Uncle Rodney had tried every known plan to get it except work, and that if mamma would just think back about two years she would remember one time when Uncle Rodney could have thanked his stars that there was one man in the connection whose generosity, or whatever mamma wanted to call it, was at least five hundred dollars shorter than his pocket book, and mamma said she defied papa to say that Uncle Rodney stole the money, that it had been malicious persecution and papa knew it, and that papa and most other men were prejudiced against Uncle Rodney, why she didn't know, and that if papa begrudged having lent Uncle Rodney the five hundred dollars when the family's good name was

at stake to say so and Grandpa would raise it somehow and pay papa back, and then she began to cry and papa said All right, all right, and mamma cried and said how Uncle Rodney was the baby and that must be why papa hated him and papa said All right, all right; for God's sake, all right.

Because mamma and papa didn't know that Uncle Rodney had been handling his business all the time he was visiting us last summer, any more than the people in Mottstown knew that he was doing business last Christmas when I worked for him the first time and he paid me the quarter. Because he said that if he preferred to do business with ladies instead of men it wasn't anybody's business except his, not even Mr. Tucker's. He said how I never went around telling people about papa's business and I said how everybody knew papa was in the livery-stable business and so I didn't have to tell them, and Uncle Rodney said Well, that was what half of the nickel was for and did I want to keep on making the nickels or did I want him to hire somebody else? So I would go on ahead and watch through Mr. Tucker's fence until he came out to go to town and I would go along behind the fence to the corner and watch until Mr. Tucker was out of sight and then I would put my hat on top of the fence post and leave it there until I saw Mr. Tucker coming back. Only he never came back while I was there because Uncle Rodney would always be through before then, and he would come up and we would walk back home and he would tell mamma how far we had walked that day and mamma would say how good that was for Uncle Rodney's health. So he just paid me a nickel at home. It wasn't as much as the quarter when he was in business with the other lady in Mottstown Christmas, but that was just one time and he visited us all summer and so by that time I had a lot more than a quarter. And besides

the other time was Christmas and he took a dose of Grandpa's tonic before he paid me the quarter and so maybe this time it might be even a half a dollar. I couldn't hardly wait.

II

BUT IT GOT TO BE daylight at last and I put on my Sunday suit, and I would go to the front door and watch for the hack and then I would go to the kitchen and ask Rosie if it wasn't almost time and she would tell me the train wasn't even due for two hours yet. Only while she was telling me we heard the hack, and so I thought it was time for us to go and get on the train and it would be fine, and then we would go to Grandpa's and then it would be tonight and then tomorrow and maybe it would be a half a dollar this time and Jesus it would be fine. Then mamma came running out without even her hat on and she said how it was two hours yet and she wasn't even dressed and John Paul said Yessum but papa sent him and papa said for John Paul to tell mamma that Aunt Louisa was here and for mamma to hurry. So we put the basket of presents into the hack and I rode on the box with John Paul and mamma hollering from inside the hack about Aunt Louisa, and John Paul said that Aunt Louisa had come in a hired buggy and papa took her to the hotel to eat breakfast because she left Mortstown before daylight even. And so maybe Aunt Louisa had come to Jefferson to help mamma and papa get a present for Grandpa.

"Because we have one for everybody else," I said, "I bought one for Uncle Rodney with my own money."

Then John Paul began to laugh and I said Why? and he said it was at the notion of me giving Uncle Rodney anything that he would want to use, and I said Why? and John Paul said because I was shaped like a man, and I said

Why? and John Paul said he bet papa would like to give Uncle Rodney a present without even waiting for Christmas, and I said What? and John Paul said A job of work. And I told John Paul how Uncle Rodney had been working all the time he was visiting us last summer, and John Paul quit laughing and said Sho, he reckoned anything a man kept at all the time, night and day both, he would call it work no matter how much fun it started out to be, and I said Anyway Uncle Rodney works now, he works in the office of the Compress Association, and John Paul laughed good then and said it would sholy take a whole association to compress Uncle Rodney. And then mamma began to holler to go straight to the hotel, and John Paul said Nome, papa said to come straight to the livery stable and wait for him. And so we went to the hotel and Aunt Louisa and papa came out and papa helped Aunt Louisa into the hack and Aunt Louisa began to cry and mamma hollering Louisa! Louisa! What is it? What has happened? and papa saying Wait now. Wait. Remember the nigger, and that meant John Paul, and so it must have been a present for Grandpa and it didn't come.

And then we didn't go on the train after all. We went to the stable and they already had the light road hack hitched up and waiting, and mamma was crying now and saying how papa never even had his Sunday clothes and papa cussing now and saying Damn the clothes; if we didn't get to Uncle Rodney before the others caught him, papa would just wear the clothes Uncle Rodney had on now. So we got into the road hack fast and papa closed the curtains and then mamma and Aunt Louisa could cry all right and papa hol-lered to John Paul to go home and tell Rosie to pack his Sunday suit and take her to the train; anyway that would be fine for Rosie. So we didn't go on the train but we went fast, with papa driving and saying Didn't anybody know

where he was? and Aunt Louisa quit crying a while and said how Uncle Rodney didn't come to supper last night, but right after supper he came in and how Aunt Louisa had a terrible feeling as soon as she heard his step in the hall and how Uncle Rodney wouldn't tell her until they were in his room and the door closed and then he said he must have two thousand dollars and Aunt Louisa said where in the world could she get two thousand dollars? and Uncle Rodney said Ask Fred, that was Aunt Louisa's husband, and George, that was papa; tell them they would have to dig it up, and Aunt Louisa said she had that terrible feeling and she said Rodney! Rodney! What—and Uncle Rodney begun to cuss and say Dammit, don't start sniveling and crying now, and Aunt Louisa said Rodney, what have you done now? and then they both heard the knocking at the door and how Aunt Louisa looked at Uncle Rodney and she knew the truth before she even laid eyes on Mr. Pruitt and the sheriff, and how she said Don't tell pa! Keep it from pa! It will kill him. . . .

"Who?" papa said. "Mister who?"

"Mr. Pruitt," Aunt Louisa said, crying again. "The president of the Compress Association. They moved to Mottstown last spring. You don't know him."

So she went down to the door and it was Mr. Pruitt and the sheriff. And how Aunt Louisa begged Mr. Pruitt for Grandpa's sake and how she gave Mr. Pruitt her oath that Uncle Rodney would stay right there in the house until papa could get there, and Mr. Pruitt said how he hated it to happen at Christmas too and so for Grandpa's and Aunt Louisa's sake he would give them until the day after Christmas if Aunt Louisa would promise him that Uncle Rodney would not try to leave Mottstown. And how Mr. Pruitt showed her with her own eyes the check with Grandpa's name signed to it and how even Aunt Louisa could see that

Grandpa's name had been—and then mamma said Louisa! Louisa! Remember Georgie! and that was me, and papa cussed too, hollering How in damnation do you expect to keep it from him? By hiding the newspapers? and Aunt Louisa cried again and said how everybody was bound to know it, that she didn't expect or hope that any of us could ever hold our heads up again, that all she hoped for was to keep it from Grandpa because it would kill him. She cried hard then and papa had to stop at a branch and get down and soak his handkerchief for mamma to wipe Aunt Louisa's face with it and then papa took the bottle of tonic out of the dash pocket and put a few drops on the handkerchief, and Aunt Louisa smelled it and then papa took a dose of the tonic out of the bottle and mamma said George! and papa drank some more of the tonic and then made like he was handing the bottle back for mamma and Aunt Louisa to take a dose too and said, "I don't blame you. If I was a woman in this family I'd take to drink too. Now let me get this bond business straight."

"It was those road bonds of ma's," Aunt Louisa said.

We were going fast again now because the horses had rested while papa was wetting the handkerchief and taking the dose of tonic, and papa was saying All right, what about the bonds? when all of a sudden he jerked around in the seat and said, "Road bonds? Do you mean he took that damn screw driver and prized open your mother's desk too?"

Then mamma said George! how can you? only Aunt Louisa was talking now, quick now, not crying now, not yet, and papa with his head turned over his shoulder and saying Did Aunt Louisa mean that that five hundred papa had to pay out two years ago wasn't all of it? And Aunt Louisa said it was twenty-five hundred, only they didn't want Grandpa to find it out, and so Grandma put up her road bonds for security on the note, and how they said now

that Uncle Rodney had redeemed Grandma's note and the road bonds from the bank with some of the Compress Association's bonds out of the safe in the Compress Association office, because when Mr. Pruitt found the Compress Association's bonds were missing he looked for them and found them in the bank and when he looked in the Compress Association's safe all he found was the check for two thousand dollars with Grandpa's name signed to it, and how Mr. Pruitt hadn't lived in Mottstown but a year but even he knew that Grandpa never signed that check and besides he looked in the bank again and Grandpa never had two thousand dollars in it, and how Mr. Pruitt said how he would wait until the day after Christmas if Aunt Louisa would give him her sworn oath that Uncle Rodney would not go away, and Aunt Louisa did it and then she went back upstairs to plead with Uncle Rodney to give Mr. Pruitt the bonds and she went into Uncle Rodney's room where she had left him, and the window was open and Uncle Rodney was gone.

"Damn Rodney!" papa said. "The bonds! You mean, nobody knows where the bonds are?"

Now we were going fast because we were coming down the last hill and into the valley where Mottstown was. Soon we would begin to smell it again; it would be just today and then tonight and then it would be Christmas, and Aunt Louisa sitting there with her face white like a whitewashed fence that has been rained on and papa said Who in hell ever gave him such a job anyway, and Aunt Louisa said Mr. Pruitt, and papa said how even if Mr. Pruitt had only lived in Mottstown a few months, and then Aunt Louisa began to cry without even putting her handkerchief to her face this time and mamma looked at Aunt Louisa and she began to cry too and papa took out the whip and hit the team a belt with it even if they were going fast and he cussed.

"Damnation to hell," papa said. "I see. Pruitt's married."

Then we could see it too. There were holly wreaths in the windows like at home in Jefferson, and I said, "They shoot fireworks in Mottstown too like they do in Jefferson."

Aunt Louisa and mamma were crying good now, and now it was papa saying Here, here; remember Georgie, and that was me, and Aunt Louisa said, "Yes, yes! Painted common thing, traipsing up and down the streets all afternoon alone in a buggy, and the one and only time Mrs. Church called on her, and that was because of Mr. Pruitt's position alone, Mrs. Church found her without corsets on and Mrs. Church told me she smelled liquor on her breath."

And papa saying Here, here, and Aunt Louisa crying good and saying how it was Mrs. Pruitt that did it because Uncle Rodney was young and easy led because he never had had opportunities to meet a nice girl and marry her, and papa was driving fast toward Grandpa's house and he said, "Marry? Rodney marry? What in hell pleasure would he get out of slipping out of his own house and waiting until after dark and slipping around to the back and climbing up the gutter and into a room where there wasn't anybody in it but his own wife."

And so mamma and Aunt Louisa were crying good when we got to Grandpa's.

III

AND UNCLE RODNEY wasn't there. We came in, and Grandma said how Mandy, that was Grandpa's cook, hadn't come to cook breakfast and when Grandma sent Emmeline, that was Aunt Louisa's baby's nurse, down to Mandy's cabin in the back yard, the door was locked on the inside but Mandy wouldn't answer and then Grandma went down there herself and Mandy wouldn't answer and so Cousin

Fred climbed in the window and Mandy was gone and Uncle Fred had just got back from town then and he and papa both hollered, "Locked? on the inside? and nobody in it?"

And then Uncle Fred told papa to go in and keep Grandpa entertained and he would go and then Aunt Louisa grabbed papa and Uncle Fred both and said she would keep Grandpa quiet and for both of them to go and find him, find him, and papa said if only the fool hasn't tried to sell them to somebody, and Uncle Fred said Good God, man, don't you know that check was dated ten days ago? And so we went in where Grandpa was reared back in his chair and saying how he hadn't expected papa until tomorrow but by God he was glad to see somebody at last because he waked up this morning and his cook had quit and Louisa had chased off somewhere before daylight and now he couldn't even find Uncle Rodney to go down and bring his mail and a cigar or two back, and so thank God Christmas never came but once a year and so be damned if he wouldn't be glad when it was over, only he was laughing now because when he said that about Christmas before Christmas he always laughed, it wasn't until after Christmas that he didn't laugh when he said that about Christmas. Then Aunt Louisa got Grandpa's keys out of his pocket herself and opened the desk where Uncle Rodney would prize it open with a screw driver, and took out Grandpa's tonic and then mamma said for me to go and find Cousin Fred and Cousin Louisa.

So Uncle Rodney wasn't there. Only at first I thought maybe it wouldn't be a quarter even, it wouldn't be nothing this time, so at first all I had to think about was that anyway it would be Christmas and that would be something anyway. Because I went on around the house, and so after a while papa and Uncle Fred came out, and I could see them through the bushes knocking at Mandy's door and calling, "Rodney, Rodney," like that. Then I had to get back in the bushes

because Uncle Fréd had to pass right by me to go to the woodshed to get the axe to open Mandy's door. But they couldn't fool Uncle Rodney. If Mr. Tucker couldn't fool Uncle Rodney in Mr. Tucker's own house, Uncle Fred and papa ought to know they couldn't fool him right in his own papa's back yard. So I didn't even need to hear them. I just waited until after a while Uncle Fred came back out the broken door and came to the woodshed and took the axe and pulled the lock and hasp and steeple off the woodhouse door and went back and then papa came out of Mandy's house and they nailed the woodhouse lock onto Mandy's door and locked it and they went around behind Mandy's house, and I could hear Uncle Fred nailing the windows up. Then they went back to the house. But it didn't matter if Mandy was in the house too and couldn't get out, because the train came from Jefferson with Rosie and papa's Sunday clothes on it and so Rosie was there to cook for Grandpa and us and so that was all right too.

But they couldn't fool Uncle Rodney. I could have told them that. I could have told them that sometimes Uncle Rodney even wanted to wait until after dark to even begin to do business. And so it was all right even if it was late in the afternoon before I could get away from Cousin Fred and Cousin Louisa. It was late; soon they would begin to shoot the fireworks downtown, and then we would be hearing it too, so I could just see his face a little between the slats where papa and Uncle Fred had nailed up the back window; I could see his face where he hadn't shaved, and he was asking me why in hell it took me so long because he had heard the Jefferson train come before dinner, before eleven o'clock, and laughing about how papa and Uncle Fred had nailed him up in the house to keep him when that was exactly what he wanted, and that I would have to slip out right after supper somehow and did I reckon I could

manage it? And I said how last Christmas it had been a quarter, but I didn't have to slip out of the house that time, and he laughed, saying Quarter? Quarter? did I ever see ten quarters all at once? and I never did, and he said for me to be there with the screw driver right after supper and I would see ten quarters, and to remember that even God didn't know where he is and so for me to get the hell away and stay away until I came back after dark with the screw driver.

And they couldn't fool me either. Because I had been watching the man all afternoon, even when he thought I was just playing and maybe because I was from Jefferson instead of Mottstown and so I wouldn't know who he was. But I did, because once when he was walking past the back fence and he stopped and lit his cigar again and I saw the badge under his coat when he struck the match and so I knew he was like Mr. Watts at Jefferson that catches the niggers. So I was playing by the fence and I could hear him stopping and looking at me and I played and he said, "Howdy, son. Santy Claus coming to see you tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"You're Miss Sarah's boy, from up at Jefferson, ain't you?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Come to spend Christmas with your grandpa, eh?" he said. "I wonder if your Uncle Rodney's at home this afternoon."

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, well, that's too bad," he said. "I wanted to see him a minute. He's downtown, I reckon?"

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, well," he said. "You mean he's gone away on a visit, maybe?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well, well," he said. "That's too bad. I wanted to see him on a little business. But I reckon it can wait." Then he looked at me and then he said, "You're sure he's out of town, then?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well, that was all I wanted to know," he said. "If you happen to mention this to your Aunt Louisa or your Uncle Fred you can tell them that was all I wanted to know."

"Yes, sir," I said. So he went away. And he didn't pass the house any more. I watched for him, but he didn't come back. So he couldn't fool me either.

IV

THEN IT BEGAN to get dark and they started to shoot the fireworks downtown. I could hear them, and soon we would be seeing the Roman candles and skyrockets and I would have the ten quarters then and I thought about the basket full of presents and I thought how maybe I could go on downtown when I got through working for Uncle Rodney and buy a present for Grandpa with a dime out of the ten quarters and give it to him tomorrow and maybe, because nobody else had given him a present, Grandpa might give me a quarter too instead of the dime tomorrow, and that would be twenty-one quarters, except for the dime, and that would be fine sure enough. But I didn't have time to do that. We ate supper, and Rosie had to cook that too, and mamma and Aunt Louisa with powder on their faces where they had been crying, and Grandpa; it was papa helping him take a dose of tonic every now and then all afternoon while Uncle Fred was downtown, and Uncle Fred came back and papa came out in the hall and Uncle Fred said he had looked everywhere, in the bank and in the Compress, and how Mr. Pruitt had helped him but they couldn't find a sign either of them or of the money, because Uncle Fred was

afraid because one night last week Uncle Rodney hired a rig and went somewhere and Uncle Fred found out Uncle Rodney drove over to the main line at Kingston and caught the fast train to Memphis, and papa said Damnation, and Uncle Fred said By God we will go down there after supper and sweat it out of him, because at least we have got him. I told Pruitt that and he said that if we hold to him, he will hold off and give us a chance.

So Uncle Fred and papa and Grandpa came in to supper together, with Grandpa between them saying Christmas don't come but once a year, thank God, so hooray for it, and papa and Uncle Fred saying Now you are all right, pa; straight ahead now, pa, and Grandpa would go straight ahead awhile and then begin to holler Where in hell is that damn boy? and that meant Uncle Rodney, and that Grandpa was a good mind to go downtown himself and haul Uncle Rodney out of that damn pool hall and make him come home and see his kinfolks. And so we ate supper and mamma said she would take the children upstairs and Aunt Louisa said No, Emmeline could put us to bed, and so we went up the back stairs, and Emmeline said how she had done already had to cook breakfast extra today and if folks thought she was going to waste all her Christmas doing extra work they never had the sense she give them credit for and that this looked like to her it was a good house to be away from nohow, and so we went into the room and then after a while I went back down the back stairs and I remembered where to find the screw driver too. Then I could hear the firecrackers plain from downtown, and the moon was shining now but I could still see the Roman candles and the skyrockets running up the sky. Then Uncle Rodney's hand came out of the crack in the shutter and took the screw driver. I couldn't see his face now and it wasn't laughing exactly, it didn't sound exactly like laughing, it was just the way he breathed behind the shutter.

Because they couldn't fool him. "All right," he said. "Now that's ten quarters. But wait. Are you sure nobody knows where I am?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I waited by the fence until he come and asked me."

"Which one?" Uncle Rodney said.

"The one that wears the badge," I said.

Then Uncle Rodney cussed. But it wasn't mad cussing. It sounded just like it sounded when he was laughing except the words.

"He said if you were out of town on a visit, and I said Yes sir," I said.

"Good," Uncle Rodney said. "By God, some day you will be as good a business man as I am. And I won't make you a liar much longer, either. So now you have got ten quarters, haven't you?"

"No," I said. "I haven't got them yet."

Then he cussed again, and I said, "I will hold my cap up and you can drop them in it and they won't spill then."

Then he cussed hard, only it wasn't loud. "Only I'm not going to give you ten quarters," he said, and I begun to say You said—and Uncle Rodney said, "Because I am going to give you twenty."

And I said Yes, sir, and he told me how to find the right house, and what to do when I found it. Only there wasn't any paper to carry this time because Uncle Rodney said how this was a twenty-quarter job, and so it was too important to put on paper and besides I wouldn't need a paper because I would not know them anyhow, and his voice coming hissing down from behind the shutter where I couldn't see him and still sounding like when he cussed while he was saying how papa and Uncle Fred had done him a favor by nailing up the door and window and they didn't even have sense enough to know it.

"Start at the corner of the house and count three windows. Then throw the handful of gravel against the window. Then when the window opens—never mind who it will be, you won't know anyway—just say who you are and then say 'He will be at the corner with the buggy in ten minutes. Bring the jewelry.' Now you say it," Uncle Rodney said.

"He will be at the corner with the buggy in ten minutes. Bring the jewelry," I said.

"Say 'Bring all the jewelry,' " Uncle Rodney said.

"Bring all the jewelry," I said.

"Good," Uncle Rodney said. Then he said, "Well? What are you waiting on?"

"For the twenty quarters," I said.

Uncle Rodney cursed again. "Do you expect me to pay you before you have done the work?" he said.

"You said about a buggy," I said. "Maybe you will forget to pay me before you go and you might not get back until after we go back home. And besides, that day last summer when we couldn't do any business with Mrs. Tucker because she was sick and you wouldn't pay me the nickel because you said it wasn't your fault Mrs. Tucker was sick."

Then Uncle Rodney cursed hard and quiet behind the crack and then he said, "Listen. I haven't got the twenty quarters now. I haven't even got one quarter now. And the only way I can get any is to get out of here and finish this business. And I can't finish this business tonight unless you do your work. See? I'll be right behind you. I'll be waiting right there at the corner in the buggy when you come back. Now, go on. Hurry."

V

SO I WENT ON ACROSS THE YARD, only the moon was bright now and I walked behind the fence until I got to the street.

And I could hear the firecrackers and I could see the Roman candles and skyrockets sliding up the sky, but the fireworks were all downtown, and so al! I could see along the street was the candles and wreaths in the windows. So I came to the lane, went up the lane to the stable, and I could hear the horse in the stable, but I didn't know whether it was the right stable or not; but pretty soon Uncle Rodney kind of jumped around the corner of the stable and said Here you are, and he showed me where to stand and listen toward the house and he went back into the stable. But I couldn't hear anything but Uncle Rodney harnessing the horse, and then he whistled and I went back and he had the horse already hitched to the buggy and I said Whose horse and buggy is this; it's a lot skinnier than Grandpa's horse? And Uncle Rodney said It's my horse now, only damn this moonlight to hell. Then I went back down the lane to the street and there wasn't anybody coming so I waved my arm in the moonlight, and the buggy came up and I got in and we went fast. The side curtains were up and so I couldn't see the skyrockets and Roman candles from town, but I could hear the firecrackers and I thought maybe we were going through town and maybe Uncle Rodney would stop and give me some of the twenty quarters and I could buy Grandpa a present for tomorrow, but we didn't; Uncle Rodney just raised the side curtain without stopping and then I could see the house, the two magnolia trees, but we didn't stop until we came to the corner.

"Now," Uncle Rodney said, "when the window opens, say 'He will be at the corner in ten minutes. Bring *all* the jewelry.' Never mind who it will be. You don't want to know who it is. You want to even forget what house it is. See?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "And then you will pay me the——"

"Yes!" he said, cussing. "Yes! Get out of here quick!"

So I got out and the buggy went on and I went back up the street. And the house was dark all right except for one light, so it was the right one, besides the two trees. So I went across the yard and counted the three windows and I was just about to throw the gravel when a lady ran out from behind a bush and grabbed me. She kept on trying to say something, only I couldn't tell what it was, and besides she never had time to say very much anyhow because a man ran out from behind another bush and grabbed us both. Only he grabbed her by the mouth, because I could tell that from the kind of slobbering noise she made while she was fighting to get loose.

"Well, boy?" he said. "What is it? Are you the one?"

"I work for Uncle Rodney," I said.

"Then you're the one," he said. Now the lady was fighting and slobbering sure enough, but he held her by the mouth.

"All right. What is it?"

Only I didn't know Uncle Rodney ever did business with men. But maybe after he began to work in the Compress Association he had to. And then he had told me I would not know them anyway, so maybe that was what he meant.

"He says to be at the corner in ten minutes," I said. "And to bring all the jewelry. He said for me to say that twice. Bring all the jewelry."

The lady was slobbering and fighting worse than ever now, so maybe he had to turn me loose so he could hold her with both hands.

"Bring all the jewelry," he said, holding the lady with both hands now. "That's a good idea. That's fine. I don't blame him for telling you to say that twice. All right. Now you go back to the corner and wait and when he comes, tell him this: 'She says to come and help carry it.' Say that to him twice, too. Understand?"

"Then I'll get my twenty quarters," I said.

"Twenty quarters, hah?" the man said, holding the lady. "That's what you are to get, is it? That's not enough. You tell him this, too: 'She says to give you a piece of the jewelry.' Understand?"

"I just want my twenty quarters," I said.

Then he and the lady went back behind the bushes again and I went on, too, back toward the corner, and I could see the Roman candles and skyrockets again from toward town and I could hear the firecrackers, and then the buggy came back and Uncle Rodney was hissing again behind the curtain like when he was behind the slats on Mandy's window.

"Well?" he said.

"She said for you to come and help carry it," I said.

"What?" Uncle Rodney said. "She said he's not there?"

"No, sir. She said for you to come and help carry it. For me to say that twice." Then I said, "Where's my twenty quarters?" because he had already jumped out of the buggy and jumped across the walk into the shadow of some bushes. So I went into the bushes too and said, "You said you would give——"

"All right; all right!" Uncle Rodney said. He was kind of squatting along the bushes; I could hear him breathing. "I'll give them to you tomorrow. I'll give you thirty quarters tomorrow. Now you get to hell on home. And if they have been down to Mandy's house, you don't know anything. Run, now. Hurry."

"I'd rather have the twenty quarters tonight," I said.

He was squatting fast along in the shadow of the bushes, and I was right behind him, because when he whirled around he almost touched me, but I jumped back out of the bushes in time and he stood there cussing at me and then he stooped down and I saw it was a stick in his hand and I turned and ran. Then he went on, squatting along in the shadow, and then I went back to the buggy, because the day after Christ-

mas we would go back to Jefferson, and so if Uncle Rodney didn't get back before then I would not see him again until next summer and then maybe he would be in business with another lady and my twenty quarters would be like my nickel that time when Mrs. Tucker was sick. So I waited by the buggy and I could watch the skyrockets and the Roman candles and I could hear the firecrackers from town, only it was late now and so maybe all the stores would be closed and so I couldn't buy Grandpa a present, even when Uncle Rodney came back and gave me my twenty quarters. So I was listening to the firecrackers and thinking about how maybe I could tell Grandpa that I had wanted to buy him a present and so maybe he might give me fifteen cents instead of a dime anyway, when all of a sudden they started shooting firecrackers back at the house where Uncle Rodney had gone. Only they just shot five of them fast, and when they didn't shoot any more I thought that maybe in a minute they would shoot the skyrockets and Roman candles too. But they didn't. They just shot the five firecrackers right quick and then stopped, and I stood by the buggy and then folks began to come out of the houses and holler at one another and then I began to see men running toward the house where Uncle Rodney had gone, and then a man came out of the yard fast and went up the street toward Grandpa's and I thought at first it was Uncle Rodney and that he had forgotten the buggy, until I saw that it wasn't.

But Uncle Rodney never came back and so I went on toward the yard to where the men were, because I could still watch the buggy too and see Uncle Rodney if he came back out of the bushes, and I came to the yard and I saw six men carrying something long and then two other men ran up and stopped me and one of them said Hell-fire, it's one of those kids, the one from Jefferson. And I could see then that what the men were carrying was a window blind with something

wrapped in a quilt on it and so I thought at first that they had come to help Uncle Rodney carry the jewelry, only I didn't see Uncle Rodney anywhere, and then one of the men said, "Who? One of the kids? Hell-fire, somebody take him on home."

So the man picked me up, but I said I had to wait on Uncle Rodney, and the man said that Uncle Rodney would be all right, and I said But I wanted to wait for him here, and then one of the men behind us said Damn it, get him on out of here, and we went on. I was riding on the man's back and then I could look back and see the six men in the moonlight carrying the blind with the bundle on it, and I said Did it belong to Uncle Rodney? and the man said No, if it belonged to anybody now it belonged to Grandpa. And so then I knew what it was.

"It's a side of beef," I said. "You are going to take it to Grandpa." Then the other man made a funny sound and the one I was riding on said Yes, you might call it a side of beef, and I said, "It's a Christmas present for Grandpa. Who is it going to be from? Is it from Uncle Rodney?"

"No," the man said. "Not from him. Call it from the men of Mottstown. From all the husbands in Mottstown."

VI

THEN WE CAME in sight of Grandpa's house. And now the lights were all on, even on the porch, and I could see folks in the hall, I could see ladies with shawls over their heads, and some more of them going up the walk toward the porch, and then I could hear somebody in the house that sounded like singing and then papa came out of the house and came down the walk to the gate and we came up and the man put me down and I saw Rosie waiting at the gate too. Only it didn't sound like singing now because there wasn't any music

with it, and so maybe it was Aunt Louisa again and so maybe she didn't like Christmas now any better than Grandpa said he didn't like it.

"It's a present for Grandpa," I said.

"Yes," papa said. "You go on with Rosie and go to bed. Mamma will be there soon. But you be a good boy until she comes. You mind Rosie. All right, Rosie. Take him on. Hurry."

"You don't need to tell me that," Rosie said. She took my hand. "Come on."

Only we didn't go back into the yard, because Rosie came out the gate and we went up the street. And then I thought maybe we were going around the back to dodge the people and we didn't do that, either. We just went on up the street, and I said, "Where are we going?"

And Rosie said, "We gonter sleep at a lady's house name Mrs. Jordon."

So we went on. I didn't say anything. Because papa had forgotten to say anything about my slipping out of the house yet and so maybe if I went on to bed and stayed quiet he would forget about it until tomorrow too. And besides, the main thing was to get a holt of Uncle Rodney and get my twenty quarters before we went back home, and so maybe that would be all right tomorrow too. So we went on and Rosie said Yonder's the house, and we went in the yard and then all of a sudden Rosie saw the possum. It was in a persimmon tree in Mrs. Jordon's yard and I could see it against the moonlight too, and I hollered, "Run! Run and get Mrs. Jordon's ladder!"

And Rosie said, "Ladder my foot! You going to bed!"

But I didn't wait. I began to run toward the house, with Rosie running behind me and hollering You, Georgie! You come back here! But I didn't stop. We could get the ladder and get the possum and give it to Grandpa along with the

side of meat and it wouldn't cost even a dime and then maybe Grandpa might even give me a quarter too, and then when I got the twenty quarters from Uncle Rodney I would have twenty-one quarters and that will be fine.

A Courtship

THIS IS HOW it was in the old days, when old Issetibbeha was still the Man, and Ikkemotubbe, Issetibbeha's nephew, and David Hogganbeck, the white man who told the steamboat where to walk, courted Herman Basket's sister.

The People all lived in the Plantation now. Issetibbeha and General Jackson met and burned sticks and signed a paper, and now a line ran through the woods, although you could not see it. It ran straight as a bee's flight among the woods, with the Plantation on one side of it, where Issetibbeha was the Man, and America on the other side, where General Jackson was the Man. So now when something happened on one side of the line, it was a bad fortune for some and a good fortune for others, depending on what the white man happened to possess, as it had always been. But merely by occurring on the other side of that line which you couldn't even see, it became what the white men called a crime punishable by death if they could just have found who did it. Which seemed foolish to us. There was one uproar which lasted off and on for a week, not that the white man had disappeared, because he had been the sort of white man which even other white men did not regret, but because of a delusion that he had been eaten. As if any man, no matter how hungry, would risk eating the flesh of a coward or thief in this country where even in winter there

is always something to be found to eat;—this land for which, as Issetibbeha used to say after he had become so old that nothing more was required of him except to sit in the sun and criticise the degeneration of the People and the folly and rapacity of politicians, the Great Spirit has done more and man less than for any land he ever heard of. But it was a free country, and if the white man wished to make a rule even that foolish in their half of it, it was all right with us.

Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck saw Herman Basket's sister. As who did not, sooner or later, young men and old men too, bachelors and widowers too, and some who were not even widowers yet, who for more than one reason within the hut had no business looking anywhere else, though who is to say what age a man must reach or just how unfortunate he must have been in his youthful compliance, when he shall no longer look at the Herman Basket's sisters of this world and chew his bitter thumbs too, *aihee*. Because she walked in beauty. Or she sat in it, that is, because she did not walk at all unless she had to. One of the earliest sounds in the Plantation would be the voice of Herman Basket's aunt crying to know why she had not risen and gone to the spring for water with the other girls, which she did not do sometimes until Herman Basket himself rose and made her, or in the afternoon crying to know why she did not go to the river with the other girls and women to wash, which she did not do very often either. But she did not need to. Anyone who looks as Herman Basket's sister did at seventeen and eighteen and nineteen does not need to wash.

Then one day Ikkemotubbe saw her, who had known her all his life except during the first two years. He was Issetibbeha's sister's son. One night he got into the steamboat with David Hogganbeck and went away. And suns passed and then moons and then three high waters came and went and

old Issetibbeha had entered the earth a year and his son Mocketubbe was the Man when Ikkemotubbe returned, named Doom now, with the white friend called the Chevalier Sœur-Blonde de Vitry and the eight new slaves which we did not need either, and his gold-laced hat and cloak and the little gold box of strong salt and the wicker wine hamper containing the four other puppies which were still alive, and within two days Mocketubbe's little son was dead and within three Ikkemotubbe whose name was Doom now was himself the Man. But he was not Doom yet. He was still just Ikkemotubbe, one of the young men, the best one, who rode the hardest and fastest and danced the longest and got the drunkest and was loved the best, by the young men and the girls and the older women too who should have had other things to think about. Then one day he saw Herman Basket's sister, whom he had known all his life except for the first two years.

After Ikkemotubbe looked at her, my father and Owl-by-Night and Sylvester's John and the other young men looked away. Because he was the best of them and they loved him then while he was still just Ikkemotubbe. They would hold the other horse for him as, stripped to the waist, his hair and body oiled with bear's grease as when racing (though with honey mixed into the bear's grease now) and with only a rope hackamore and no saddle as when racing, Ikkemotubbe would ride on his new racing pony past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister sat shelling corn or peas into the silver wine pitcher which her aunt had inherited from her second cousin by marriage's great-aunt who was old David Colbert's wife, while Log-in-the-Creek (one of the young men too, though nobody paid any attention to him. He raced no horses and fought no cocks and cast no dice, and even when forced to, he would not even dance fast enough to keep out of the other dancers' way, and disgraced

both himself and the others each time by becoming sick after only five or six horns of what was never even his whisky) leaned against one of the gallery posts and blew into his harmonica. Then one of the young men held the racing pony, and on his gaited mare now and wearing his flower-painted weskit and pigeon-tailed coat and beaver hat in which he looked handsomer than a steamboat gambler and richer even than the whisky-trader, Ikkemotubbe would ride past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas into the pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek sat with his back against the post and blew into the harmonica. Then another of the young men would take the mare too and Ikkemotubbe would walk to Herman Basket's and sit on the gallery too in his fine clothes while Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas perhaps into the silver pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor, blowing into the harmonica. Then the whisky-trader came and Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods until they became tired of carrying him. And although a good deal wasted outside, as usual Log-in-the-Creek became sick and then asleep after seven or eight horns, and Ikkemotubbe returned to Herman Basket's gallery, where for a day or two at least he didn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Finally Owl-at-Night made a suggestion. "Send Herman Basket's aunt a gift." But the only thing Ikkemotubbe owned which Herman Basket's aunt didn't, was the new racing pony. So after a while Ikkemotubbe said, "So it seems I want this girl even worse than I believed," and sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to Herman Basket's kitchen door handle. Then he thought how Herman Basket's aunt could not even always make Herman Basket's sister just get up and go to the spring for water. Besides, she was the second cousin by marriage to the grand-niece

of the wife of old David Colbert, the chief Man of all the Chickasaws in our section, and she looked upon Issetibbeha's whole family and line as mushrooms.

"But Herman Basket has been known to make her get up and go to the spring," my father said. "And I never heard him claim that old Dave Colbert's wife or his wife's niece or anybody else's wife or niece or aunt was any better than anybody else. Give Herman the horse."

"I can beat that," Ikkemotubbe said. Because there was no horse in the Plantation or America either between Natchez and Nashville whose tail Ikkemotubbe's new pony ever looked at. "I will run Herman a horse-race for his influence," he said. "Run," he told my father. "Catch Owl-at-Night before he reaches the house." So my father brought the pony back in time. But just in case Herman Basket's aunt had been watching from the kitchen window or something, Ikkemotubbe sent Owl-at-Night and Sylvester's John home for his crate of gamecocks, though he expected little from this since Herman Basket's aunt already owned the best cocks in the Plantation and won all the money every Sunday morning anyway. And then Herman Basket declined to commit himself, so a horse-race would have been merely for pleasure and money. And Ikkemotubbe said how money could not help him, and with that damned girl on his mind day and night his tongue had forgotten the savor of pleasure. But the whisky-trader always came, and so for a day or two at least he wouldn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Then David Hogganbeck also looked at Herman Basket's sister, whom he too had been seeing once each year since the steamboat first walked to the Plantation. After a while even winter would be over and we would begin to watch the mark which David Hogganbeck had put on the landing to show us when the water would be tall enough for the steamboat to walk in. Then the river would reach the mark, and

sure enough within two suns the steamboat would cry in the Plantation. Then all the People—men and women and children and dogs, even Herman Basket's sister because Ikkemotubbe would fetch a horse for her to ride and so only Log-in-the-Creek would remain, not inside the house even though it was still cold, because Herman Basket's aunt wouldn't let him stay inside the house where she would have to step over him each time she passed, but squatting in his blanket on the gallery with an old cooking-pot of fire inside the blanket with him—would stand on the landing, to watch the upstairs and the smokestack moving among the trees and hear the puffing of the smokestack and its feet walking fast in the water too when it was not crying. Then we would begin to hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle, and then the steamboat would come walking up the last of the river like a race-horse, with the smoke rolling black and its feet flinging the water aside as a running horse flings dirt, and Captain Studenmare who owned the steamboat chewing tobacco in one window and David Hogganbeck playing his fiddle in the other, and between them the head of the boy slave who turned the wheel, who was not much more than half as big as Captain Studenmare and not even a third as big as David Hogganbeck. And all day long the trading would continue, though David Hogganbeck took little part in this. And all night long the dancing would continue, and David Hogganbeck took the biggest part in this. Because he was bigger than any two of the young men put together almost, and although you would not have called him a man built for dancing or running either, it was as if that very double size which could hold twice as much whisky as any other, could also dance twice as long, until one by one the young men fell away and only he was left. And there was horse-racing and eating, and although David Hogganbeck had no horses and did not ride one since no horse could

have carried him and run fast too, he would eat a match each year for money against any two of the young men whom the People picked, and David Hogganbeck always won. Then the water would return toward the mark he had made on the landing, and it would be time for the steamboat to leave while there was still enough water in the river for it to walk in.

And then it did not go away. The river began to grow little, yet still David Hogganbeck played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher and Ikkemotubbe sat against a post in his fine clothes and his beaver hat and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor with the harmonica cupped in both hands to his mouth, though you couldn't hear now whether he was blowing into it or not. Then you could see the mark which David Hogganbeck had marked on the landing while he still played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery where Ikkemotubbe had brought a rocking chair from his house to sit in until David Hogganbeck would have to leave in order to show the steamboat the way back to Natchez. And all that afternoon the People stood along the landing and watched the steamboat's slaves hurling wood into its stomach for steam to make it walk; and during most of that night, while David Hogganbeck drank twice as much and danced twice as long as even David Hogganbeck, so that he drank four times as much and danced four times as long as even Ikkemotubbe, even an Ikkemotubbe who at last had looked at Herman Basket's sister or at least had looked at someone else looking at her, the older ones among the People stood along the landing and watched the slaves hurling wood into the steamboat's stomach, not to make it walk but to make its voice cry while Captain Studenmare leaned out of the upstairs with the end of the crying-rope tied to the door-handle. And the next

day Captain Studenmare himself came onto the gallery and grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"You're fired," he said.

"All right," David Hogganbeck said. Then Captain Studenmare grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"We will have to go back to Natchez where I can get money to pay you off," he said.

"Leave the money at the saloon," David Hogganbeck said. "I'll bring the boat back out next spring."

Then it was night. Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that if they were going to stay there all night, at least David Hogganbeck would have to stop playing his fiddle so other people could sleep. Then she came out and said for Herman Basket's sister to come in and go to bed. Then Herman Basket came out and said, "Come on now, fellows. Be reasonable." Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that the next time she was going to bring Herman Basket's dead uncle's shotgun. So Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the floor and stepped down from the gallery. "Goodnight," David Hogganbeck said.

"I'll walk home with you," Ikkemotubbe said. So they walked across the Plantation to the steamboat. It was dark and there was no fire in its stomach now because Captain Studenmare was still asleep under Issetibbeha's back porch. Then Ikkemotubbe said, "Goodnight."

"I'll walk home with you," David Hogganbeck said. So they walked back across the Plantation to Ikkemotubbe's house. But David Hogganbeck did not have time to say goodnight now because Ikkemotubbe turned as soon as they reached his house and started back toward the steamboat. Then he began to run, because David Hogganbeck still did not look like a man who could run fast. But he had not looked like a man who could dance a long time either, so

when Ikkemotubbe reached the steamboat and turned and ran again, he was only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck. And when they reached Ikkemotubbe's house he was still only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck when he stopped, breathing fast but only a little fast, and held the door open for David Hogganbeck to enter.

"My house is not very much house," he said. "But it is yours." So they both slept in Ikkemotubbe's bed in his house that night. And the next afternoon, although Herman Basket would still do no more than wish him success, Ikkemotubbe sent my father and Sylvester's John with his saddle mare for Herman Basket's aunt to ride on, and he and Herman Basket ran the horse-race. And he rode faster than anyone had ever ridden in the Plantation. He won by lengths and lengths and, with Herman Basket's aunt watching, he made Herman Basket take all the money, as though Herman Basket had won, and that evening he sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to the door-handle of Herman Basket's kitchen. But that night Herman Basket's aunt did not even warn them. She came out the first time with Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun, and hardly a moment had elapsed before Ikkemotubbe found out that she meant him too. So he and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the gallery and they stopped for a moment at my father's house on the first trip between Ikkemotubbe's house and the steamboat, though when my father and Owl-at-Night finally found Ikkemotubbe to tell him that Herman Basket's aunt must have sent the racing pony far into the woods and hidden it because they had not found it yet, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were both asleep in David Hogganbeck's bed in the steamboat.

And the next morning the whisky-trader came, and that afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods and my father and Sylvester's

John returned for the whisky-trader's buckboard and, with my father and Sylvester's John driving the buckboard and Log-in-the-Creek lying on his face on top of the little house on the back of the buckboard where the whisky-kegs rode and Ikkemotubbe standing on top of the little house, wearing the used general's coat which General Jackson gave Issetibbeha, with his arms folded and one foot advanced onto Log-in-the-Creek's back, they rode slow past the gallery where David Hogganbeck played his fiddle while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher. And when my father and Owl-at-Night found Ikkemotubbe that night to tell him they still had not found where Herman Basket's aunt had hidden the pony, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were at Ikke-motubbe's house. And the next afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited David Hogganbeck into the woods and it was a long time this time and when they came out, David Hogganbeck was driving the buckboard while the legs of Ikkemotubbe and the other young men dangled from the open door of the little whisky-house like so many strands of vine hay and Issetibbeha's general's coat was tied by its sleeves about the neck of one of the mules. And nobody hunted for the racing pony that night, and when Ikkemotubbe waked up, he didn't know at first even where he was. And he could already hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle before he could move aside enough of the young men to get out of the little whisky-house, because that night neither Herman Basket's aunt nor Herman Basket and then finally Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun could persuade David Hogganbeck to leave the gallery and go away or even to stop playing the fiddle.

So the next morning Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck squatted in a quiet place in the woods while the young men, except Sylvester's John and Owl-by-Night who were

still hunting for the horse, stood on guard. "We could fight for her then," David Hogganbeck said.

"We could fight for her," Ikkemotubbe said. "But white men and the People fight differently. We fight with knives, to hurt good and to hurt quickly. That would be all right, if I were to lose. Because I would wish to be hurt good. But if I am to win, I do not wish you to be hurt good. If I am to truly win, it will be necessary for you to be there to see it. On the day of the wedding, I wish you to be present, or at least present somewhere, not lying wrapped in a blanket on a platform in the woods, waiting to enter the earth." Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe put his hand on David Hogganbeck's shoulder and smiled at him. "If that could satisfy me, we would not be squatting here discussing what to do. I think you see that."

"I think I do," David Hogganbeck said.

Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe removed his hand from David Hogganbeck's shoulder. "And we have tried whisky," he said.

"We have tried that," David Hogganbeck said.

"Even the racing pony and the general's coat failed me," Ikkemotubbe said. "I had been saving them, like a man with two hole-cards."

"I wouldn't say that the coat completely failed," David Hogganbeck said. "You looked fine in it."

"Aihee," Ikkemotubbe said. "So did the mule." Then my father said how he was not smiling either as he squatted beside David Hogganbeck, making little marks in the earth with a twig. "So there is just one other thing," he said. "And I am already beaten at that too before we start."

So all that day they ate nothing. And that night when they left Log-in-the-Creek lying on Herman Basket's gallery, instead of merely walking for a while and then running for a while back and forth between Ikkemotubbe's house

and the steamboat, they began to run as soon as they left Herman Basket's. And when they lay down in the woods to sleep, it was where they would not only be free of temptation to eat but of opportunity too, and from which it would take another hard run as an appetiser to reach the Plantation for the match. Then it was morning and they ran back to where my father and the young men waited on horses to meet them and tell Ikkemotubbe that they still hadn't found where under the sun Herman Basket's aunt could have hidden the pony and to escort them back across the Plantation to the race-course, where the People waited around the table, with Ikkemotubbe's rocking chair from Herman Basket's gallery for Issetibbeha and a bench behind it for the judges. First there was a recess while a ten-year-old boy ran once around the race-track, to let them recover breath. Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck took their places on either side of the table, facing each other across it, and Owl-at-Night gave the word.

First, each had that quantity of stewed bird chitterlings which the other could scoop with two hands from the pot. Then each had as many wild turkey eggs as he was old, Ikkemotubbe twenty-two and David Hogganbeck twenty-three, though Ikkemotubbe refused the advantage and said he would eat twenty-three too. Then David Hogganbeck said he was entitled to one more than Ikkemotubbe so he would eat twenty-four, until Issetibbeha told them both to hush and get on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the shells. Then there was the tongue, paws and melt of a bear, though for a little while Ikkemotubbe stood and looked at his half of it while David Hogganbeck was already eating. And at the half-way he stopped and looked at it again while David Hogganbeck was finishing. But it was all right; there was a faint smile on his face such as the young men had seen on it at the end of a hard running when he was going from

now on not on the fact that he was still alive but on the fact that he was Ikkemotubbe. And he went on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the bones, and the women set the roasted shote on the table and Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck moved back to the tail of the shote and faced one another across it and Owl-at-Night had even given the word to start until he gave another word to stop. "Give me some water," Ikkemotubbe said. So my father handed him the gourd and he even took a swallow. But the water returned as though it had merely struck the back of his throat and bounced, and Ikkemotubbe put the gourd down and raised the tail of his shirt before his bowed face and turned and walked away as the People opened aside to let him pass.

And that afternoon they did not even go to the quiet place in the woods. They stood in Ikkemotubbe's house while my father and the others stood quietly too in the background. My father said that Ikkemotubbe was not smiling now. "I was right yesterday," he said. "If I am to lose to thee, we should have used the knives. You see," he said, and now my father said he even smiled again, as at the end of the long hard running when the young men knew that he would go on, not because he was still alive but because he was Ikkemotubbe; "—you see, although I have lost, I still cannot reconcile."

"I had you beat before we started," David Hogganbeck said. "We both knew that."

"Yes," Ikkemotubbe said. "But I suggested it."

"Then what do you suggest now?" David Hogganbeck said. And now my father said how they loved David Hogganbeck at that moment as they loved Ikkemotubbe; that they loved them both at that moment while Ikkemotubbe stood before David Hogganbeck with the smile on his face and his right hand flat on David Hogganbeck's chest, because there were men in those days.

"Once more then, and then no more," Ikkemotubbe said. "The Cave." Then he and David Hogganbeck stripped and my father and the others oiled them, body and hair too, with bear's grease mixed with mint, not just for speed this time but for lasting too, because the Cave was a hundred and thirty miles away, over in the country of old David Colbert—a black hole in the hill which the spoor of wild creatures merely approached and then turned away and which no dog could even be beaten to enter and where the boys from among all the People would go to lie on their first Night-away-from-Fire to prove if they had the courage to become men, because it had been known among the People from a long time ago that the sound of a whisper or even the disturbed air of a sudden movement would bring parts of the roof down and so all believed that not even a very big movement or sound or maybe none at all at some time would bring the whole mountain into the cave. Then Ikke-motubbe took the two pistols from the trunk and drew the loads and reloaded them. "Whoever reaches the Cave first can enter it alone and fire his pistol," he said. "If he comes back out, he has won."

"And if he does not come back out?" David Hogganbeck said.

"Then you have won," Ikkemotubbe said.

"Or you," David Hogganbeck said.

And now my father said how Ikkemotubbe smiled again at David Hogganbeck. "Or me," he said. "Though I think I told you yesterday that such as that for me will not be victory." Then Ikkemotubbe put another charge of powder, with a wadding and bullet, into each of two small medicine bags, one for himself and one for David Hogganbeck, just in case the one who entered the Cave first should not lose quick enough, and, wearing only their shirts and shoes and each with his pistol and medicine bag looped on a cord

around his neck, they emerged from Ikkemotubbe's house and began to run.

It was evening then. Then it was night, and since David Hogganbeck did not know the way, Ikkemotubbe continued to set the pace. But after a time it was daylight again and now David Hogganbeck could run by the sun and the landmarks which Ikkemotubbe described to him while they rested beside a creek, if he wished to go faster. So sometimes David Hogganbeck would run in front and sometimes Ikkemotubbe, then David Hogganbeck would pass Ikkemotubbe as he sat beside a spring or a stream with his feet in the water and Ikkemotubbe would smile at David Hogganbeck and wave his hand. Then he would overtake David Hogganbeck and the country was open now and they would run side by side in the prairies with his hand lying lightly on David Hogganbeck's shoulder, not on the top of the shoulder but lightly against the back of it until after a while he would smile at David Hogganbeck and draw ahead. But then it was sundown, and then it was dark again so Ikkemotubbe slowed and then stopped until he heard David Hogganbeck and knew that David Hogganbeck could hear him and then he ran again so that David Hogganbeck could follow the sound of his running. So when David Hogganbeck fell, Ikkemotubbe heard it and went back and found David Hogganbeck in the dark and turned him onto his back and found water in the dark and soaked his shirt in it and returned and wrung the water from the shirt into David Hogganbeck's mouth. And then it was daylight and Ikkemotubbe waked also and found a nest containing five unfledged birds and ate and brought the other three to David Hogganbeck and then he went on until he was just this side of where David Hogganbeck could no longer see him and sat down again until David Hogganbeck got up onto his feet.

And he gave David Hogganbeck the landmarks for that

day too, talking back to David Hogganbeck over his shoulder as they ran, though David Hogganbeck did not need them because he never overtook Ikkemotubbe again. He never came closer than fifteen or twenty paces, although it looked at one time like he was. Because this time it was Ikkemotubbe who fell. And the country was open again so Ikkemotubbe could lie there for a long time and watch David Hogganbeck coming. Then it was sunset again, and then it was dark again, and he lay there listening to David Hogganbeck coming for a long time until it was time for Ikkemotubbe to get up and he did and they went on slowly in the dark with David Hogganbeck at least a hundred paces behind him, until he heard David Hogganbeck fall and then he lay down too. Then it was day again and he watched David Hogganbeck get up onto his feet and come slowly toward him and at last he tried to get up too but he did not and it looked like David Hogganbeck was going to come up with him. But he got up at last while David Hogganbeck was still four or five paces away and they went on until David Hogganbeck fell, and then Ikkemotubbe thought he was just watching David Hogganbeck fall until he found that he had fallen too but he got up onto his hands and knees and crawled still another ten or fifteen paces before he too lay down. And there in the sunset before him was the hill in which the Cave was, and there through the night, and there still in the sunrise.

So Ikkemotubbe ran into the Cave first, with his pistol already cocked in his hand. He told how he stopped perhaps for a second at the entrance, perhaps to look at the sun again or perhaps just to see where David Hogganbeck had stopped. But David Hogganbeck was running too and he was still only that fifteen or twenty paces behind, and besides, because of that damned sister of Herman Basket's, there had been no light nor heat either in that sun for moons

and moons. So he ran into the Cave and turned and saw David Hogganbeck also running into the Cave and he cried, "Back, fool!" But David Hogganbeck still ran into the Cave even as Ikkemotubbe pointed his pistol at the roof and fired. And there was a noise, and a rushing, and a blackness and a dust, and Ikkemotubbe told how he thought, *Aihee. It comes.* But it did not, and even before the blackness he saw David Hogganbeck cast himself forward onto his hands and knees, and there was not a complete blackness either because he could see the sunlight and air and day beyond the tunnel of David Hogganbeck's arms and legs as, still on his hands and knees, David Hogganbeck held the fallen roof upon his back. "Hurry," David Hogganbeck said. "Between my legs. I can't—"

"Nay, brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "Quickly thyself, before it crushes thee. Crawl back."

"Hurry," David Hogganbeck said behind his teeth. "Hurry, damn you." And Ikkemotubbe did, and he remembered David Hogganbeck's buttocks and legs pink in the sunrise and the slab of rock which supported the fallen roof pink in the sunrise too across David Hogganbeck's back. But he did not remember where he found the pole nor how he carried it alone into the Cave and thrust it into the hole beside David Hogganbeck and stooped his own back under it and lifted until he knew that some at least of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole.

"Now," he said. "Quickly."

"No," David Hogganbeck said.

"Quickly, brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "The weight is off thee."

"Then I can't move," David Hogganbeck said. But Ikkemotubbe couldn't move either, because now he had to hold the fallen roof up with his back and legs. So he reached one hand and grasped David Hogganbeck by the meat and

jerked him backward out of the hole until he lay face-down upon the earth. And maybe some of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole before, but now all of the weight was on it and Ikkemotubbe said how he thought, *This time surely aihee*. But it was the pole and not his back which snapped and flung him face-down too across David Hogganbeck like two flung sticks, and a bright gout of blood jumped out of David Hogganbeck's mouth.

But by the second day David Hogganbeck had quit vomiting blood, though Ikkemotubbe had run hardly forty miles back toward the Plantation when my father met him with the horse for David Hogganbeck to ride. Presently my father said, "I have a news for thee."

"So you found the pony," Ikkemotubbe said. "All right. Come on. Let's get that damned stupid fool of a white man—"

"No, wait, my brother," my father said. "I have a news for thee."

And presently Ikkemotubbe said, "All right."

But when Captain Studenmare borrowed Issetibbeha's wagon to go back to Natchez in, he took the steamboat slaves too. So my father and the young men built a fire in the steamboat's stomach to make steam for it to walk, while David Hogganbeck sat in the upstairs and drew the crying-rope from time to time to see if the steam was strong enough yet, and at each cry still more of the People came to the landing until at last all the People in the Plantation except old Issetibbeha perhaps stood along the bank to watch the young men hurl wood into the steamboat's stomach:—a thing never before seen in our Plantation at least. Then the steam was strong and the steamboat began to walk and then the People began to walk too beside the steamboat, watching the young men for a while then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck for a while as the steamboat walked out of the Plantation where hardly seven suns ago Ikkemotubbe and

David Hogganbeck would sit all day long and half the night too until Herman Basket's aunt would come out with Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun, on the gallery of Herman Basket's house while Log-in-the-Creek lay on the floor with his harmonica cupped to his mouth and Log-in-the-Creek's wife shelled corn or peas into old Dave Colbert's wife's grand-niece's second cousin by marriage's wine pitcher. Presently Ikkemotubbe was gone completely away, to be gone a long time before he came back named Doom, with his new white friend whom no man wished to love either and the eight more slaves which we had no use for either because at times someone would have to get up and walk somewhere to find something for the ones we already owned to do, and the fine gold-trimmed clothes and the little gold box of salt which caused the other four puppies to become dead too one after another, and then anything else which happened to stand between Doom and what he wanted. But he was not quite gone yet. He was just Ikkemotubbe yet, one of the young men, another of the young men who loved and was not loved in return and could hear the words and see the fact, yet who, like the young men who had been before him and the ones who would come after him, still could not understand it.

"But not for her!" Ikkemotubbe said. "And not even because it was Log-in-the-Creek. Perhaps they are for myself: that such a son as Log-in-the-Creek could cause them to wish to flow."

"Don't think about her," David Hogganbeck said.

"I don't. I have already stopped. See?" Ikkemotubbe said while the sunset ran down his face as if it had already been rain instead of light when it entered the window. "There was a wise man of ours who said once how a woman's fancy is like a butterfly which, hovering from flower to flower, pauses at the last as like as not where a horse has stood."

"There was a wise man of ours named Solomon who often

said something of that nature too," David Hogganbeck said. "Perhaps there is just one wisdom for all men, no matter who speaks it."

"Aihee. At least, for all men one same heart-break," Ikkemotubbe said. Then he drew the crying-rope, because the boat was now passing the house where Log-in-the-Creek and his wife lived, and now the steamboat sounded like it did the first night while Captain Studenmare still thought David Hogganbeck would come and show it the way back to Natchez, until David Hogganbeck made Ikkemotubbe stop. Because they would need the steam because the steamboat did not always walk. Sometimes it crawled, and each time its feet came up there was mud on them, and sometimes it did not even crawl until David Hogganbeck drew the crying-rope as the rider speaks to the recalcitrant horse to remind it with his voice just who is up. Then it crawled again and then it walked again, until at last the People could no longer keep up, and it cried once more beyond the last bend and then there was no longer either the black shapes of the young men leaping to hurl wood into its red stomach or even the sound of its voice in the Plantation or the night. That's how it was in the old days.

Pennsylvania Station

I

THEY SEEMED to bring with them the smell of the snow falling in Seventh Avenue. Or perhaps the other people who had entered before them had done it, bringing it with them in their lungs and exhaling it, filling the arcade with a stale chill like that which might lie unwinded and spent upon the cold plains of infinity itself. In it the bright and serried shop-windows had a fixed and insomniac glare like the eyes of people drugged with coffee, sitting up with a strange corpse.

In the rotunda, where the people appeared as small and intent as ants, the smell and sense of snow still lingered, though high now among the steel girders, spent and vitiated too and filled here with a weary and ceaseless murmuring, like the voices of pilgrims upon the infinite plain, like the voices of all the travelers who had ever passed through it quiring and ceaseless as lost children.

They went on toward the smoking room. It was the old man who looked in the door. "All right," he said. He looked sixty, though he was probably some age like forty-eight or fifty-two or fifty-eight. He wore a long overcoat with a collar which had once been fur, and a cap with earflaps like the caricature of an up-State farmer. His shoes were not mates. "There ain't many here yet. It will be some time now." While they stood there three other men came and looked into the smoking room with that same air not quite diffident

and not quite furtive, with faces and garments that seemed to give off that same effluvium of soup kitchens and Salvation Army homes. They entered; the old man led the way toward the rear of the room, among the heavy, solid benches on which still more men of all ages sat in attitudes of thought or repose and looking as transient as scarecrows blown by a departed wind upon a series of rock ledges. The old man chose a bench and sat down, making room for the young man beside him. "I used to think that if you sat somewhere about the middle, he might skip you. But I found out that it don't make much difference where you sit."

"Nor where you lie, either," the young man said. He wore an army overcoat, new, and a pair of yellow army brogans of the sort that can be bought from so-called army stores for a dollar or so. He had not shaved in some time. "And it don't make a hell of a lot of difference whether you are breathing or not while you are lying there. I wish I had a cigarette. I have got used to not eating but be damned if I don't hate to get used to not smoking."

"Sure now," the old man said. "I wish I had a cigarette to give you. I ain't used tobacco myself since I went to Florida. That was funny: I hadn't smoked in ten years, yet as soon as I got back to New York, that was the first thing I thought about. Isn't that funny?"

"Yes," the young man said. "Especially if you never had any tobacco when you thought about wanting it again."

"Wanting it and not having it couldn't have worried me then," the old man said. "I was all right then. Until I—" He settled himself. Into his face came that rapt expression of the talkative old, without heat or bewilderment or rancor. "What confused me was I thought all the time that the burying money was all right. As soon as I found out about Danny's trouble I come right back to New York —"

II

"Who is this Danny, anyway?" the young man said.

"Didn't I tell you? He's Sister's boy. There wasn't any of us left but Sister and Danny and me. Yet I was the weakly one. The one they all thought wouldn't live. I was give up to die twice before I was fifteen, yet I outlived them all. Outlived all eight of them when Sister died three years ago. That was why I went to Florida to live. Because I thought I couldn't stand the winters here. Yet I have stood three of them now since Sister died. But sometimes it looks like a man can stand just about anything if he don't believe he can stand it. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know," the young man said. "Which trouble was this?"

"Which?"

"Which trouble was Danny in now?"

"Don't get me wrong about Danny. He wasn't bad; just wild, like any young fellow. But not bad."

"All right," the young man said. "It wasn't any trouble then."

"No. He's a good boy. He's in Chicago now. Got a good job now. The lawyer in Jacksonville got it for him right after I come back to New York. I didn't know he had it until I tried to wire him that Sister was dead. Then I found that he was in Chicago, with a good job. He sent Sister a wreath of flowers that must have cost two hundred dollars. Sent it by air; that cost something, too. He couldn't come himself because he had just got the job and his boss was out of town and he couldn't get away. He was a good boy. That was why when that trouble come up about that woman on the floor below that accused him of stealing the clothes off her clothes-line, that I told Sister I would send him the railroad fare to Jacksonville, where I could look after him. Get

him clean away from them low-life boys around the saloons and such. I come all the way from Florida to see about him. That was how I happened to go with Sister to see Mr. Pinckski, before she ever begun to pay on the coffin. She wanted me to go with her. Because you know how an old woman is. Only she wasn't old, even if her and me had outlived all the other seven. But you know how an old woman seems to get comfort out of knowing she will be buried right in case there isn't any of her kin there to 'tend to it. I guess maybe that keeps a lot of them going."

"And especially with Danny already too busy to see if she was buried at all, himself."

The old man, his mouth already shaped for further speech, paused and looked at the young man. "What?"

"I say, if getting into the ground at last don't keep some of them going, I don't know what it is that does."

"Oh. Maybe so. That ain't never worried me. I guess because I was already give up to die twice before I was fifteen. Like now every time a winter gets through, I just say to myself, 'Well, I'll declare. Here I am again.' That was why I went to Florida: because of the winters here. I hadn't been back until I got Sister's letter about Danny, and I didn't stay long then. And if I hadn't got the letter about Danny, maybe I wouldn't ever have come back. But I come back, and that was when she took me with her to see Mr. Pinckski before she begun to pay on the coffin, for me to see if it was all right like Mr. Pinckski said. He told her how the insurance companies would charge her interest all the time. He showed us with the pencil and paper how if she paid her money to the insurance companies it would be the same as if she worked six minutes longer every night and give the money for the extra six minutes to the insurance company. But Sister said she wouldn't mind that, just six minutes,

because at three or four o'clock in the morning six minutes wouldn't ——"

"Three or four o'clock in the morning?"

"She scrubbed in them tall buildings down about Wall Street somewhere. Her and some other ladies. They would help one another night about, so they could get done at the same time and come home on the subway together. So Mr. Pinckski showed us with the pencil and paper how if she lived fifteen years longer say for instance Mr. Pinckski said, it would be the same as if she worked three years and eighty-five days without getting any pay for it. Like for three years and eighty-five days she would be working for the insurance companies for nothing. Like instead of living fifteen years, she would actually live only eleven years and two hundred and eight days. Sister stood there for a while, holding her purse under her shawl. Then she said, 'If I was paying the insurance companies to bury me instead of you, I would have to live three years and eighty-five days more before I could afford to die?'

" 'Well,' Mr. Pinckski said, like he didn't know what to say. 'Why, yes. Put it that way, then. You would work for the insurance companies three years and eighty-five days and not get any pay for it.'

" 'It ain't the work I mind,' Sister said. 'It ain't the working.' Then she took the first half a dollar out of her purse and put it down on Mr. Pinckski's desk."

III

NOW AND THEN, with a long and fading reverberation, a subway train passed under their feet. Perhaps they thought momentarily of two green eyes tunneling violently through the earth without apparent propulsion or guidance, as though of their own unparalleled violence creating, like

spaced beads on a string, lighted niches in whose wan and fleeting glare human figures like corpses set momentarily on end in a violated grave yard leaned in one streaming and rigid direction and flicked away.

"Because I was a weak child. They give me up to die twice before I was fifteen. There was an insurance agent sold me a policy once, worried at me until I said all right, I would take it. Then they examined me and the only policy they would give me was a thousand dollars at the rate of fifty years old. And me just twenty-seven then. I was the third one of eight, yet when Sister died three years ago I had outlived them all. So when we got that trouble of Danny's about the woman that said he stole the clothes fixed up, Sister could ——"

"How did you get it fixed up?"

"We paid the money to the man that his job was to look after the boys that Danny run with. The alderman knew Danny and the other boys. It was all right then. So Sister could go on paying the fifty cents to Mr. Pinckski every week. Because we fixed it up for me to send the railroad fare for Danny as soon as I could, so he could be in Florida where I could look out for him. And I went back to Jacksonville and Sister could pay Mr. Pinckski the fifty cents without worrying. Each Sunday morning when her and the other ladies got through, they would go home by Mr. Pinckski's and wake him up and Sister would give him the fifty cents.

"He never minded what time it was because Sister was a good customer. He told her it would be all right, whatever time she got there, to wake him up and pay him. So sometimes it would be as late as four o'clock, especially if they had had a parade or something and the buildings messed up with confetti and maybe flags. Maybe four times a year the lady that lived next door to Sister would write me a letter

telling me how much Sister had paid to Mr. Pinckski and that Danny was getting along fine, behaving and not running around with them tough boys any more. So when I could I sent Danny the railroad fare to Florida. I never expected to hear about the money.

"That was what confused me. Sister could read some. She could read the church weekly fine that the priest gave her, but she never was much for writing. She said if she could just happen to find a pencil the size of a broom handle that she could use both hands on, that she could write fine. But regular pencils were too small for her. She said she couldn't feel like she had anything in her hand. So I never expected' to hear about the money. I just sent it and then I fixed up with the landlady where I was living for a place for Danny, just thinking that some day soon Danny would just come walking in with his suit-case. The landlady kept the room a week for me, and then a man come in to rent it, so there wasn't anything she could do but give me the refusal of it.

"That wasn't no more than fair, after she had already kept it open a week for me. So I begun to pay for the room and when Danny didn't come I thought maybe something had come up, with the hard winter and all, and Sister needed the money worse than to send Danny to Florida on it, or maybe she thought he was too young yet. So after three months I let the room go. Every three or four months I would get the letter from the lady next door to Sister, about how every Sunday morning Sister and the other ladies would go to Mr. Pinckski and pay him the fifty cents. After fifty-two weeks, Mr. Pinckski set the coffin aside, with her name cut on a steel plate and nailed onto the coffin, her full name: Mrs. Margaret Noonan Gihon.

"It was a cheap coffin at first, just a wooden box, but after she had paid the second fifty-two half a dollars he took

the name plate off of it and nailed it onto a better coffin, letting her pick it out herself in case she died that year. And after the third fifty-two half a dollars he let her pick out a still finer one, and the next year one with gold handles on it. He would let her come in and look at it whenever she wanted and bring whoever she wanted with her, to see the coffin and her name cut in the steel plate and nailed onto it. Even at four o'clock in the morning he would come down in his night-shirt and unlock the door and turn the light on for Sister and the other ladies to go back and look at the coffin.

"Each year it got to be a better coffin, with Mr. Pinckski showing the other ladies with the pencil and paper how Sister would have the coffin paid out soon and then she would just be paying on the gold handles and the lining. He let her pick out the lining too that she wanted and when the lady next door wrote me the next letter, Sister sent me a sample of the lining and a picture of the handles. Sister drew the picture, but she never could use a pencil because she always said the handle was too small for her to hold, though she could read the church weekly the priest gave her, because she said the Lord illuminated it for her."

"Is that so?" the young man said. "Jesus, I wish I either had a smoke or I would quit thinking about it."

"Yes. And a sample of the lining. But I couldn't tell much about it except that it suited Sister and that she liked it how Mr. Pinckski would let her bring in the other ladies to look at the trimmings and help her make 'up her mind. Because Mr. Pinckski said he would trust her because he didn't believe she would go and die on him to hurt his business like some did, and him not charging her a cent of interest like the insurance companies would charge. All she had to do was just to stop there every Sunday morning and pay him the half a dollar."

"Is that so?" the young man said. "He must be in the poor-house now."

"What?" The old man looked at the young man, his expression fixed. "Who in the poor-house now?"

IV

"WHERE WAS Danny all this time? Still doing his settlement work?"

"Yes. He worked whenever he could get a job. But a high-spirited young fellow, without nobody but a widow woman mother, without no father to learn him how you have to give and take in this world. That was why I wanted him down in Florida with me."

Now his arrested expression faded; he went easily into narration again with a kind of physical and unlistening joy, like a checked and long-broken horse slacked off again.

"That was what got me confused. I had already sent the money for him to come to Jacksonville on and when I never heard about it I just thought maybe Sister needed it with the hard winter and all or maybe she thought Danny was too young, like women will. And then about eight months after I let the room go I had a funny letter from the lady that lived next door to Sister. It said how Mr. Pinckski had moved the plate onto the next coffin and it said how glad Sister was that Danny was doing so well and she knew I would take good care of him because he was a good boy, besides being all Sister had. Like Danny was already in Florida, all the time.

"But I never knew he was there until I got the wire from him. It come from Augustine, not any piece away; I never found out until Sister died how Mrs. Zilich, that's the lady next door to her, that wrote the letters for Sister, had written me that Danny was coming to Florida the day he left,

the day after the money come. Mrs. Zilich told how she had written the letter for Sister and give it to Danny himself to mail the night before he left. I never got it. I reckon Danny never mailed it. I reckon, being a young, high-spirited boy, he decided he wanted to strike out himself and show us what he could do without any help from us, like I did when I come to Florida.

"Mrs. Zilich said she thought of course Danny was with me and that she thought at the time it was funny that when I would write to Sister I never mentioned Danny. So when she would read the letters to Sister she would put in something about Danny was all right and doing fine. So when I got the wire from Danny in Augustine I telephoned Mrs. Zilich in New York. It cost eleven dollars. I told her that Danny was in a little trouble, not serious, and for her to not tell Sister it was serious trouble, to just tell her that we would need some money. Because I had sent money for Danny to come to Florida on and I had paid the three months for the room and I had just paid the premium on my insurance, and so the lawyer looked at Danny and Danny sitting there on the cot in the cell without no collar on and Danny said, 'Where would I get any money,' only it was jack he called it.

"And the lawyer said, 'Where would you get it?' and Danny said, 'Just set me down back home for ten minutes. I'll show you.' 'Seventy-five bucks,' he says, telling me that was all of it. Then the lawyer says that was neither here nor there and so I telephoned to Mrs. Zilich and told her to tell Sister to go to Mr. Pinckski and ask him to let her take back some of the coffin money; he could put the name plate back on the coffin she had last year or maybe the year before, and as soon as I could get some money on my insurance policy I would pay Mr. Pinckski back and some interest too. I telephoned from the jail, but I didn't say where I was tele-

phoning from; I just said we would need some money quick."

"What was he in for this time?" the young man said.

"He wasn't in jail the other time, about them clothes off that line. That woman was lying about him. After we paid the money, she admitted she was probably mistaken."

"All right," the young man said. "What was he in for?"

"They called it grand larceny and killing a policeman. They framed him, them others did that didn't like him. He was just wild. That was all. He was a good boy. When Sister died he couldn't come to the funeral. But he sent a wreath that must have cost \$200 if it cost a cent. By air mail, with the high postage in the . . ."

His voice died away; he looked at the young man with a kind of pleased astonishment. "I'll declare I made a joke. But I didn't mean ——"

"Sure. I know you didn't mean to make a joke. What about the jail?"

"The lawyer was already there when I got there. Some friends had sent the lawyer to help him. And he swore to me on his mother's name that he wasn't even there when the cop got shot. He was in Orlando at the time. He showed me a ticket from Orlando to Waycross that he had bought and missed the train; that was how he happened to have it with him. It had the date punched in it, the same night the policeman got killed, showing that Danny wasn't even there and that them other boys had framed him. He was mad. The lawyer said how he would see the friends that had sent him to help Danny and get them to help. 'By God, they better,' Danny said. 'If they think I'm going to take this laying down they better ——'

"Then the lawyer got him quiet again, like he did when Danny was talking about that money the man he worked for or something had held out on him back in New York. And

so I telephoned Mrs. Zilich, so as not to worry Sister, and told her to go to Mr. Pinckski. Two days later I got the telegram from Mrs. Zilich. I guess Mrs. Zilich hadn't never sent a telegram before and so she didn't know she had ten words without counting the address because it just said You and Danny come home quick Mrs. Sophie Zilich New York.

"I couldn't make nothing out of it and we talked it over and the lawyer said I better go and see, that he would take care of Danny till I got back. So we fixed up a letter from Danny to Sister, for Mrs. Zilich to read to her, about how Danny was all right and getting along fine ——"

V

AT THAT moment there entered the room a man in the uniform of the railway company. As he entered, from about him somewhere—behind, above—a voice came. Though it spoke human speech it did not sound like a human voice, since it was too big to have emerged from known man and it had a quality at once booming, cold, and forlorn, as though it were not interested in nor listening to what it said.

"There," the old man said.

He and the young man turned and looked back across the benches, as most of the other heads had done, as though they were all dummies moved by a single wire. The man in uniform advanced slowly into the room, moving along the first bench. As he did so the men on that bench and on the others began to rise and depart, passing the man in uniform as though he were not there; he too moving on into the room as if it were empty. "I guess we'll have to move."

"Hell," the young man said. "Let him come in and ask for them. They pay him to do it."

"He caught me the other night. The second time, too."

"What about that? This time won't make but three. What did you do then?"

"Oh, yes," the old man said. "I knew that was the only thing to do, after that telegram. Mrs. Zilich wouldn't have spent the money to telegraph without good reason. I didn't know what she had told Sister. I just knew that Mrs. Zilich thought there wasn't time to write a letter and that she was trying to save money on the telegram, not knowing she had ten words and the man at the telegraph office not telling her better. So I didn't know what was wrong. I never suspected it at all. That was what confused me, you see."

He turned and looked back again toward the man in uniform moving from bench to bench while just before him the men in mismatched garments, with that identical neatness of indigence, with that identical air of patient and indomitable forlornness, rose and moved toward the exit in a monstrous and outrageous analogy to flying fish before the advancing prow of a ship.

"What confused you?" the young man said.

"Mrs. Zilich told me. I left Danny in the jail. (Them friends that sent him the lawyer got him out the next day. When I heard from him again, he was already in Chicago, with a good job; he sent that wreath. I didn't know he was even gone from the jail until I tried to get word to him about Sister), and I come on to New York. I had just enough money for that, and Mrs. Zilich met me at the station and told me. At this station right here. It was snowing that night, too. She was waiting at the top of the steps.

"Where's Sister?" I said. 'She didn't come with you?'

"What is it now?" Mrs. Zilich said. 'You don't need to tell me he is just sick.'

"Did you tell Sister he ain't just sick?" I said. 'I didn't have to,' Mrs. Zilich said. 'I didn't have time to, even if I would have.' She told about how it was cold that night and

so she waited up for Sister, keeping the fire going and a pot of coffee ready, and how she waited till Sister had took off her coat and shawl and was beginning to get warm, setting there with a cup of coffee; then Mrs. Zilich said, 'Your brother telephoned from Florida.' That's all she had time to say. She never even had to tell Sister how I said for her to go to Mr. Pinckski, because Sister said right off, 'He will want that money.' Just what I had said, you see.

"Mrs. Zilich noticed it too. 'Maybe it's because you are kin, both kin to that—' Then she stopped and said, 'Oh, I ain't going to say anything about him. Don't worry. The time to do that is past now.' Then she told me how she said to Sister, 'You can stop there on the way down this afternoon and see Mr. Pinckski.' But Sister was already putting on her coat and shawl again and her not an hour home from work and it snowing. She wouldn't wait."

"She had to take back the coffin money, did she?" the young man said.

"Yes. Mrs. Zilich said that her and Sister went to Mr. Pinckski and woke him up. And he told them that Sister had already taken the money back."

"What?" the young man said. "Already?"

"Yes. He said how Danny had come to him about a year back, with a note from Sister saying to give Danny the money that she had paid in to Mr. Pinckski and that Mr. Pinckski did it. And Sister standing there with her hands inside her shawl, not looking at anything until Mrs. Zilich said, 'A note? Mrs. Gihon never sent you a note because she can't write,' and Mr. Pinckski said, 'Should I know if she can't write or not when her own son brings me a note signed with her name?' and Mrs. Zilich says, 'Let's see it.'

"Sister hadn't said anything at all, like she wasn't even there, and Mr. Pinckski showed them the note. I saw it too. It said, 'Received of Mr. Pinckski a hundred and thirty

dollars being the full amount deposited with him less interest. Mrs. Margaret N. Gihon.' And Mrs. Zilich said how she thought about that hundred and thirty dollars and she thought how Sister had paid twenty-six dollars a year for five years and seven months, and she said, 'Interest? What interest?' and Mr. Pinckski said, 'For taking the name off the coffin,' because that made the coffin second-handed. And Mrs. Zilich said that Sister turned and went toward the door. 'Wait,' Mrs. Zilich said. 'We're going to stay right here until you get that money. There's something funny about this because you can't write to sign a note.' But Sister just went on toward the door until Mrs. Zilich said, 'Wait, Margaret.' And then Sister said, 'I signed it.' "

VI

THE VOICE of the man in uniform could be heard now as he worked slowly toward them: "Tickets. Tickets. Show your tickets."

"I guess it's hard enough to know what a single woman will do," the old man said. "But a widow woman with just one child. I didn't know she could write, either. I guess she picked it up cleaning up them offices every night. Anyway, Mr. Pinckski showed me the note, how she admitted she signed it, and he explained to me how the difference was; that he had to charge to protect himself in case the coffins ever were refused and become second-hand; that some folks was mighty particular about having a brand new coffin.

"He had put the plate with Sister's name on it back onto the cheap coffin that she started off with, so she was still all right for a coffin, even if it never had any handles and lining. I never said anything about that; that twenty-six dollars she had paid in since she give the money to Danny wouldn't have helped any; I had already spent that much getting back

to see about the money, and anyway, Sister still had a coffin ——”

The voice of the man in uniform was quite near now, with a quality methodical, monotonous, and implacable: “Tickets. Tickets. Show your tickets. All without railroad tickets.”

The young man rose. “I’ll be seeing you,” he said. The old man rose too. Beyond the man in uniform the room was almost empty.

“I guess it’s about time,” the old man said. He followed the young man into the rotunda. There was an airplane in it, motionless, squatting, with a still, beetling look like a huge bug preserved in alcohol. There was a placard beside it, about how it had flown over mountains and vast wastes of snow.

“They might have tried it over New York,” the young man said. “It would have been closer.”

“Yes,” the old man said. “It costs more, though. But I guess that’s fair, since it is faster. When Sister died, Danny sent a wreath of flowers by air. It must have cost two hundred dollars. The wreath did, I mean. I don’t know what it cost to send it by air.”

Then they both looked up the ramp and through the arcade, toward the doors on Seventh Avenue. Beyond the doors lay a thick, moribund light that seemed to fill the arcade with the smell of snow and of cold, so that for a while longer they seemed to stand in the grip of a dreadful reluctance and inertia.

“So they went on back home,” the old man said. “Mrs. Zilich said how Sister was already shaking and she got Sister to bed. And that night Sister had a fever and Mrs. Zilich sent for the doctor and the doctor looked at Sister and told Mrs. Zilich she had better telegraph if there was anybody to telegraph to. When I got home Sister didn’t know me. The

priest was already there, and we never could tell if she knew anything or not, not even when we read the letter from Danny that we had fixed up in the jail, about how he was all right. The priest read it to her, but we couldn't tell if she heard him or not. That night she died."

"Is that so?" The young man said, looking up the ramp. He moved. "I'm going to the Grand Central."

Again the old man moved, with that same unwearying alacrity. "I guess that's the best thing to do. We might have a good while there." He looked up at the clock; he said with pleased surprise: "Half past one already. And a half an hour to get there. And if we're lucky, we'll have two hours before he comes along. Maybe three. That'll be five o'clock. Then it will be only two hours more till daylight."

Artist at Home

ROGER HOWES WAS a fattish, mild, nondescript man of forty, who came to New York from the Mississippi Valley somewhere as an advertisement writer and married and turned novelist and sold a book and bought a house in the Valley of Virginia and never went back to New York again, even on a visit. For five years he had lived in the old brick house with his wife Anne and their two children, where old ladies came to tea in horsedrawn carriages or sent the empty carriages for him or sent by Negro servants in the otherwise empty carriages shoots and cuttings of flowering shrubs and jars of pickle or preserves and copies of his books for autographs.

He didn't go back to New York any more, but now and then New York came to visit him: the ones he used to know, the artists and poets and such he knew before he began to earn enough food to need a cupboard to put it in. The painters, the writers, that hadn't sold a book or a picture—men with beards sometimes in place of collars, who came and wore his shirts and socks and left them under the bureau when they departed, and women in smocks but sometimes not: those gaunt and eager and carnivorous tymbesteres of Art.

At first it had been just hard to refuse them, but now it was harder to tell his wife that they were coming. Sometimes he did not know himself they were coming. They usually

wired him, on the day on which they would arrive, usually collect. He lived four miles from the village and the book hadn't sold quite enough to own a car too, and he was a little fat, a little overweight, so sometimes it would be two or three days before he would get his mail. Maybe he would just wait for the next batch of company to bring the mail up with them. After the first year the man at the station (he was the telegraph agent and the station agent and Roger's kind of town agent all in one) got to where he could recognize them on sight. They would be standing on the little platform, with that blank air, with nothing to look at except a little yellow station and the back end of a moving train and some mountains already beginning to get dark, and the agent would come out of his little den with a handful of mail and a package or so, and the telegram. "He lives about four miles up the Valley. You can't miss it."

"Who lives about four miles up the valley?"

"Howes does. If you all are going up there, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind taking these letters to him. One of them is a telegram."

"A telegram?"

"It come this a.m. But he ain't been to town in two-three days. I thought maybe you'd take it to him."

"Telegram? Hell. Give it here."

"It's forty-eight cents to pay on it."

"Keep it, then. Hell."

So they would take everything except the telegram and they would walk the four miles to Howes', getting there after supper. Which would be all right, because the women would all be too mad to eat anyway, including Mrs. Howes, Anne. So a couple of days later, someone would send a carriage for Roger and he would stop at the village and pay out the wire telling him how his guests would arrive two days ago.

So when this poet in the sky-blue coat gets off the train,

the agent comes right out of his little den, with the telegram. "It's about four miles up the Valley," he says. "You can't miss it. I thought maybe you'd take this telegram up to him. It come this a.m., but he ain't been to town for two-three days. You can take it. It's paid."

"I know it is," the poet says. "Hell. You say it is four miles up there?"

"Right straight up the road. You can't miss it."

So the poet took the telegram and the agent watched him go on out of sight up the Valley Road, with a couple or three other folks coming to the doors to look at the blue coat maybe. The agent grunted. "Four miles," he said. "That don't mean no more to that fellow than if I had said four switch frogs. But maybe with that dressing-sacque he can turn bird and fly it."

Roger hadn't told his wife, Anne, about this poet at all, maybe because he didn't know himself. Anyway, she didn't know anything about it until the poet came limping into the garden where she was cutting flowers for the supper table, and told her she owed him forty-eight cents.

"Forty-eight cents?" Anne said.

He gave her the telegram. "You don't have to open it now, you see," the poet said. "You can just pay me back the forty-eight cents and you won't have to even open it." She stared at him, with a handful of flowers and the scissors in the other hand, so finally maybe it occurred to him to tell her who he was. "I'm John Blair," he said. "I sent this telegram this morning to tell you I was coming. It cost me forty-eight cents. But now I'm here, so you don't need the telegram."

So Anne stands there, holding the flowers and the scissors, saying "Damn, Damn, Damn" while the poet tells her how she ought to get her mail oftener. "You want to keep up with what's going on," he tells her, and her saying "Damn, Damn.

Damn," until at last he says he'll just stay to supper and then walk back to the village, if it's going to put her out that much.

"Walk?" she said, looking him up and down. "You walk? Up here from the village? I don't believe it. Where is your baggage?"

"I've got it on. Two shirts, and I have an extra pair of socks in my pocket. Your cook can wash, can't she?"

She looks at him, holding the flowers and the scissors. Then she tells him to come on into the house and live there forever. Except she didn't say exactly that. She said: "You walk? Nonsense. I think you're sick. You come in and sit down and rest." Then she went to find Roger and tell him to bring down the pram from the attic. Of course she didn't say exactly that, either.

Roger hadn't told her about this poet; he hadn't got the telegram himself yet. Maybe that was why she hauled him over the coals so that night: because he hadn't got the telegram.

They were in their bedroom. Anne was combing out her hair. The children were spending the summer up in Connecticut, with Anne's folks. He was a minister, her father was. "You told me that the last time would be the last. Not a month ago. Less than that, because when that last batch left I had to paint the furniture in the guest room again to hide where they put their cigarettes on the dressing table and the window ledges. And I found in a drawer a broken comb I would not have asked Pinkie (Pinkie was the Negro cook) to pick up, and two socks that were not even mates that I bought for you myself last winter, and a single stocking that I couldn't even recognize any more as mine. You tell me that Poverty looks after its own: well, let it. But why must we be instruments of Poverty?"

"This is a poet. That last batch were not poets. We haven't

had a poet in the house in some time. Place losing all its mellifluous overtones and subtleties."

"How about that woman that wouldn't bathe in the bathroom? who insisted on going down to the creek every morning without even a bathing suit, until Amos Crain's (he was a farmer that lived across the creek from them) wife had to send me word that Amos was afraid to try to plow his lower field? What do people like that think that out-doors, the country, is? I cannot understand it, any more than I can understand why you feel that you should feed and lodge ——"

"Ah, that was just a touch of panic fear that probably did Amos good. Jolted him out of himself, out of his rut."

"The rut where he made his wife's and children's daily bread, for six days. And worse than that. Amos is young. He probably had illusions about women until he saw that creature down there without a stitch on."

"Well, you are in the majority, you and Mrs. Crain." He looked at the back of her head, her hands combing out her hair, and her probably watching him in the mirror and him not knowing it, what with being an artist and all. "This is a man poet."

"Then I suppose he will refuse to leave the bathroom at all. I suppose you'll have to carry a tray to him in the tub three times a day. Why do you feel compelled to lodge and feed these people? Can't you see they consider you an easy mark? that they eat your food and wear your clothes and consider us hopelessly bourgeois for having enough food for other people to eat, and a little soft-brained for giving it away? And now this one, in a sky-blue dressing-sacque."

"There's a lot of wear and tear to just being a poet. I don't think you realize that."

"Oh, I don't mind. Let him wear a lamp shade or a sauce pan too. What does he want of you? advice, or just food and lodging?"

"Not advice. You must have gathered at supper what his opinion of my mentality is."

"He revealed pretty clearly what his own mentality is. The only thing in the house that really pleased him was Pinkie's colored head-rag."

"Not advice," Roger said. "I don't know why he shows me his stuff. He does it like you'd give caviar to an elephant."

"And of course you accept his dictum about the elephant. And I suppose you are going to get them to publish his book, too."

"Well, there's some good stuff in it. And maybe if he sees it in print, he'll really get busy. Work. Or maybe someone will make him mad enough to really write something. Something with an entrail in it. He's got it in him. It may not be but one poem. But it's there. Maybe if he can just stop talking long enough to get it out. And I thought if he came down here, where he will have to walk four miles to find somebody to talk to, once Amos comes to recognize that blue coat."

"Ah," Anne said. "So you wrote him to come. I knew you had, but I'm glad to hear you admit it of your own free will. Go on to bed," she said. "You haven't done a stroke of work today, and Lord only knows now when you will."

Thus life went along in its old pleasant way. Because poets are all different from one another, it seemed; this one, anyway. Because it soon developed that Anne doesn't see this poet at all, hardly. It seems that she can't even know he is in the house unless she hears him snoring at night. So it took her two weeks to get steamed up again. And this time she is not even combing her hair. "Is it two weeks he's been here, or just two years?" She is sitting at the dressing table, but she is not doing anything, which any husband, even an artist, should know is a bad sign. When you see a woman sitting half dressed before a dressing table with a mirror and not

even watching herself talk in the mirror, it's time to smell smoke in the wind.

"He has been here two weeks, but unless I happen to go to the kitchen, I never see him, since he prefers Pinkie's company to ours. And when he was missing that first Wednesday night, on Pinkie's evening off, I said at first, 'What tact.' That was before I learned that he had taken supper with Pinkie's family at her house and had gone with them to prayer meeting. And he went again Sunday night and again last Wednesday night, and now tonight (and though he tells me I have neither intelligence nor imagination) he would be surprised to know that I am imagining right now that sky-blue dressing-sacque in a wooden church full of sweating niggers without any incongruity at all."

"Yes. It's quite a picture, isn't it?"

"But apart from such minor embarrassments like not knowing where our guest is, and bearing upon our patient brows a certain amount of reflected ridiculousness, he is a very pleasant companion. Instructing, edifying, and self-effacing. I never know he is even in the house unless I hear your typewriter, because I know it is not you because you have not written a line in—is it two weeks, or just two years? He enters the room which the children are absolutely forbidden and puts his one finger on that typewriter which Pinkie is not even permitted to touch with a dust-cloth, and writes a poem about freedom and flings it at you to commend and applaud. What is it he says?"

"You tell. This is fine."

"He flings it at you like—like . . . Wait; I've got it: like flinging caviar at an elephant, and he says, 'Will this sell?' Not, Is this good? or Do you like it? Will this sell? and you ——"

"Go on. I couldn't hope to even compete."

"You read it, carefully. Maybe the same poem, I don't

know; I've learned recently on the best authority that I am not intelligent enough to get my poetry at first hand. You read it, carefully, and then you say, 'It ought to. Stamps in the drawer there.' " She went to the window. "No, I haven't evolved far enough yet to take my poetry straight; I won't understand it. It has to be fed to me by hand, when he has time, on the terrace after supper on the nights when there is no prayer meeting at Pinkie's church. Freedom. Equality. In words of one syllable, because it seems that, being a woman, I don't want freedom and don't know what equality means, until you take him up and show him in professional words how he is not so wise, except he is wise enough to shut up then and let you show both of us how you are not so wise either." The window was above the garden. There were curtains in it. She stood between the curtains, looking out. "So Young Shelley has not crashed through yet."

"Not yet. But it's there. Give him time."

"I'm glad to hear that. He's been here two weeks now. I'm glad his racket is poetry, something you can perpetrate in two lines. Otherwise, at this rate . . ." She stood between the curtains. They were blowing, slow, in and out. "Damn. Damn. Damn. He doesn't eat enough."

So Roger went and put another cushion in the pram. Only she didn't say exactly that and he didn't do exactly that.

Now get this. This is where it starts. On the days when there wasn't any prayer meeting at the nigger church, the poet has taken to doping along behind her in the garden while she cut the flowers for the supper table, talking to her about poetry or freedom or maybe about the flowers. Talking about something, anyway; maybe when he quit talking all of a sudden that night when he and she were walking in the garden after supper, it should have tipped her off. But it didn't. Or at least, when they came to the end of the path

and turned, the next thing she seemed to know was his mug all set for the haymaker. Anyway, she didn't move until the clinch was over. Then she flung back, her hand lifted. "You damned idiot!" she says.

He doesn't move either, like he is giving her a fair shot. "What satisfaction will it be to slap this mug?" he says.

"I know that," she says. She hits him on the chest with her fist, light, full, yet restrained all at the same time: mad and careful too. "Why did you do such a clumsy thing?"

But she doesn't get anything out of him. He just stands there, offering her a clean shot; maybe he is not even looking at her, with his hair all over the place and this sky-blue coat that fits him like a short horse-blanket. You take a rooster, an old rooster. An old bull is different. See him where the herd has run him out, blind and spavined or whatever, yet he still looks married. Like he was saying, "Well, boys, you can look at me now. But I was a husband and father in my day." But an old rooster. He just looks unmarried, a born bachelor. Born a bachelor in a world without hens and he found it out so long ago he don't even remember there are not any hens. "Come along," she says, turning fast, stiff-backed, and the poet doping along behind her. Maybe that's what gave him away. Anyway, she looks back, slowing. She stops. "So you think you are the hot shot, do you?" she says. "You think I'm going to tell Roger, do you?"

"I don't know," he says. "I hadn't thought about it."

"You mean, you don't care whether I tell him or not?"

"Yes," he says.

"Yes what?"

It seems she can't tell whether he's looking at her or not, whether he ever looked at her. He just stands there, doping, about twice as tall as she is. "When I was a little boy, we would have sherbet on Sunday," he says. "Just a breath of lemon in it. Like narcissus smells, I remember. I think I re-

member. I was . . . four . . . three. Mother died and we moved to a city. Boarding-house. A brick wall. There was one window, like a one-eyed man with sore eyes. And a dead cat. But before that we had lots of trees, like you have. I would sit on the kitchen steps in the late afternoon, watching the Sunday light in the trees, eating sherbet."

She is watching him. Then she turns, walking fast. He follows, doping along a little behind her, so that when she stops in the shadow of a clump of bushes, with her face all fixed, he stands there like this dope until she touches him. And even then he doesn't get it. She has to tell him to hurry. So he gets it, then. A poet is human, it seems, just like a man.

But that's not it. That can be seen in any movie. This is what it is, what is good.

About this time, coincident with this second clinch, Roger happens to come out from behind this bush. He comes out kind of happen-so; pleasant and quiet from taking a little stroll in the moonlight to settle his supper. They all three stroll back to the house, Roger in the middle. They get there so quick that nobody thinks to say goodnight when Anne goes on in the house and up the stairs. Or maybe it is because Roger is doing all the talking himself at that moment, poetry having gone into a slump, you might say. "Moonlight," Roger is saying, looking at the moon like he owned it too; "I can't stand it any more. I run to walls, an electric light. That is, moonlight used to make me feel sad and old and I would do that. But now I'm afraid it don't even make me feel lonely any more. So I guess I am old."

"That's a fact," the poet says. "Where can we talk?"

"Talk?" Roger says. He looked like a head-waiter, anyway: a little bald, flourishing, that comes to the table and lifts off a cover and looks at it like he is saying, "Well, you can eat this muck, if you want to pay to do it." "Right this way."

he says. They go to the office, the room where he writes his books, where he doesn't even let the children come at all. He sits behind the typewriter and fills his pipe. Then he sees that the poet hasn't sat down. "Sit down," he says.

"No," the poet says. "Listen," he says. "Tonight I kissed your wife. I'm going to again, if I can."

"Ah," Roger says. He is too busy filling the pipe right to look at the poet, it seems. "Sit down."

"No," the poet says.

Roger lights the pipe. "Well," he says, "I'm afraid I can't advise you about that. I have written a little poetry, but I never could seduce women." He looks at the poet now. "Look here," he says, "you are not well. You go on to bed. We'll talk about this tomorrow."

"No," the poet says, "I cannot sleep under your roof."

"Anne keeps on saying you are not well," Roger says. "Do you know of anything that's wrong with you?"

"I don't know," the poet says.

Roger sucks at the pipe. He seems to be having a little trouble making it burn right. Maybe that is why he slams the pipe down on the desk, or maybe he is human too, like a poet. Anyway, he slams the pipe down on the desk so that the tobacco pops out burning among the papers. And there they are: the bald husband with next week's flour and meat actually in sight, and the home-wrecker that needs a haircut, in one of these light blue jackets that ladies used to wear with lace boudoir caps when they would be sick and eat in bed. "What in hell do you mean," Roger says, "coming in my house and eating my food and bothering Anne with your damned . . ." But that was all. But even that was pretty good for a writer, an artist; maybe that's all that should be expected from them. Or maybe it was because the poet wasn't even listening to him. "He's not even here," Roger says to himself; like he had told the poet, he used to write poetry himself,

and so he knew them. "He's up there at Anne's door now, kneeling outside her door." And outside that door was as close to Anne as Roger got too, for some time. But that was later, and he and the poet are now in the office, with him trying to make the poet shut his yap and go up to bed, and the poet refusing.

"I cannot lie under your roof," the poet says. "May I see Anne?"

"You can see her in the morning. Any time. All day, if you want to. Don't talk drivell."

"May I speak to Anne?" the poet says, like he might have been speaking to a one-syllable feeb.

So Roger goes up and tells Anne and comes back and sits behind the typewriter again and then Anne comes down and Roger hears her and the poet goes out the front door. After awhile Anne comes back alone. "He's gone," she says.

"Is he?" Roger says, like he is not listening. Then he jumps up. "Gone? He can't—this late. Call him back."

"He won't come back," Anne says. "Let him alone." She goes on upstairs. When Roger went up a little later, the door was locked.

Now get this. This is it. He came back down to the office and put some paper into the typewriter and began to write. He didn't go very fast at first, but by daylight he was sounding like forty hens in a sheet-iron corn-crib, and the written sheets on the desk were piling up. . . .

He didn't see or hear of the poet for two days. But the poet was still in town. Amos Crain saw him and came and told Roger. It seems that Amos happened to come to the house for something, because that was the only way anybody could have got to Roger to tell him anything for two days and nights. "I heard that typewriter before I crossed the creek," Amos says. "I see that blue dressing-sacque at the hotel yesterday," he says.

That night, while Roger was at work, Anne came down the stairs. She looked in the office door. "I'm going to meet him," she said.

"Will you tell him to come back?" Roger said. "Will you tell him I sent the message?"

"No," Anne said.

And the last thing she heard when she went out and when she came back an hour later and went upstairs and locked her door (Roger was sleeping on the sleeping-porch now, on an army cot) was the typewriter.

And so life went on in its old, pleasant, happy way. They saw one another often, sometimes twice a day after Anne quit coming down to breakfast. Only, a day or so after that, she missed the sound of the typewriter; maybe she missed being kept awake by it. "Have you finished it?" she said. "The story?"

"Oh. No. No, it's not finished yet. Just resting for a day or so." Bull market in typewriting, you might say.

It stayed bullish for several days. He had got into the habit of going to bed early, of being in his cot on the sleeping-porch when Anne came back into the house. One night she came out onto the sleeping-porch, where he was reading in bed. "I'm not going back again," she said. "I'm afraid to."

"Afraid of what? Aren't two children enough for you? Three, counting me."

"I don't know." It was a reading lamp and her face was in the shadow. "I don't know." He turned the light, to shine it on her face, but before it got to her face she turned, running. He got there just in time to have the door banged in his face. "Blind! Blind!" she said beyond the door. "Go away! Go away!"

He went away, but he couldn't get to sleep. So after a while he took the metal shade off the reading lamp and jim-

mied the window into the room where the children slept. The door from here into Anne's room wasn't locked. Anne was asleep. The moon was getting down then, and he could see her face. He hadn't made any noise, but she waked anyway, looking up at him, not moving. "He's had nothing, nothing. The only thing he remembers of his mother is the taste of sherbet on Sunday afternoon. He says my mouth tastes like that. He says my mouth is his mother." She began to cry. She didn't move, face-up on the pillow, her arms under the sheet, crying. Roger sat on the edge of the bed and touched her and she flopped over then, with her face down against his knee, crying.

They talked until about daylight. "I don't know what to do. Adultery wouldn't get me—anybody—into that place where he lives. Lives? He's never lived. He's ——" She was breathing quiet, her face turned down, but still against his knee—him stroking her shoulder. "Would you take me back?"

"I don't know." He stroked her shoulder. "Yes. Yes. I'd take you back."

And so the typewriting market picked up again. It took a spurt that night, as soon as Anne got herself cried off to sleep, and the market held steady for three or four days, without closing at night, even after Pinkie told him how the telephone was out of fix and he found where the wires were cut and knows where he can find the scissors that did it when he wants to. He doesn't go to the village at all, even when he had a free ride. He would spend half a morning sitting by the road, waiting for somebody to pass that would bring him back a package of tobacco or sugar or something. "If I went to the village, he might have left town," he said.

On the fifth day, Amos Crain brought him his mail. That was the day the rain came up. There was a letter for Anne.

"He evidently doesn't want my advice on this," he said to himself. "Maybe he has already sold it." He gave the letter to Anne. She read it, once.

"Will you read it?" she said.

"I wouldn't care to," he said.

But the typing market is still steady, so that when the rain came up this afternoon, he had to turn on the light. The rain was so hard on the house that he could watch his fingers (he used two or three of them) hitting the keys without hearing a sound. Pinkie didn't come, so after a while he quit and fixed a tray and took it up and left it on a chair outside Anne's door. He didn't stop to eat, himself.

It was after dark when she came down the first time. It was still raining. He saw her cross the door, going fast, in a raincoat and a rubber hat. He caught her as she opened the front door, with the rain blowing in. "Where are you going?" he said.

She tried to jerk her arm loose. "Let me alone."

"You can't go out in this. What is it?"

"Let me alone. Please." She jerked her arm, pulling at the door which he was holding.

"You can't. What is it? I'll do it. What is it?"

But she just looked at him, jerking at her arm and at the door knob. "I must go to the village. Please, Roger."

"You can't do that. At night, and in all this rain."

"Please. Please." He held her. "Please. Please." But he held her, and she let the door go and went back up stairs. And he went back to the typewriter, to this market still going great guns.

He is still at it at midnight. This time Anne has on a bathrobe. She stands in the door, holding to the door. Her hair is down. "Roger," she says. "Roger."

He goes to her, fast for a fat man; maybe he thinks she is sick. "What? What is it?"

She goes to the front door and opens it; the rain comes in again. "There," she says. "Out there."

"What?"

"He is. Blair."

He draws her back. He makes her go to the office, then he puts on his raincoat and takes the umbrella and goes out. "Blair!" he calls. "John!" Then the shade on the office window goes up, where Anne has raised it and carried the desk lamp to the window and turned the light out-doors, and then he sees Blair, standing in the rain, without any hat, with his blue coat like it was put on him by a paper-hanger, with his face lifted toward Anne's window.

And here we are again: the bald husband, the rural plute, and this dashing blade, this home-wrecking poet. Both gentlemen, being artists: the one that doesn't want the other to get wet; the other whose conscience won't let him wreck the house from inside. Here we are, with Roger trying to hold one of these green silk, female umbrellas over himself and the poet too, jerking at the poet's arm.

"You damned fool! Come in the house!"

"No." His arm gives a little as Roger jerks at it, but the poet himself doesn't move.

"Do you want to drown? Come on, man!"

"No."

Roger jerks at the poet's arm, like jerking at the arm of a wet saw-dust doll. Then he begins to yell at the house: "Anne! Anne!"

"Did she say for me to come in?" the poet says.

"I—Yes. Yes. Come in the house. Are you mad?"

"You're lying," the poet says. "Let me alone."

"What are you trying to do?" Roger says. "You can't stand here like this."

"Yes, I can. You go on in. You'll take cold."

Roger runs back to the house; they have an argument first,

because Roger wants the poet to keep the umbrella and the poet won't do it. So Roger runs back to the house. Anne is at the door. "The fool," Roger says. "I can't ——"

"Come in!" Anne calls. "John! Please!" But the poet has stepped out of the light and vanished. "John!" Anne calls. Then she began to laugh, staring at Roger from between her hair brushing at her hair with her hands. "He—he looked so f—funny. He l—looked so ——" Then she was not laughing and Roger had to hold her up. He carried her upstairs and put her to bed and sat with her until she could stop crying. Then he went back to the office. The lamp was still at the window, and when he moved it the light went across the lawn and he saw Blair again. He was sitting on the ground, with his back against a tree, his face raised in the rain toward Anne's window. Roger rushed out again, but when he got there, Blair was gone. Roger stood under the umbrella and called him for a while, but he never got any answer. Maybe he was going to try again to make the poet take the umbrella. So maybe he didn't know as much about poets as he thought he did. Or maybe he was thinking about Pope. Pope might have had an umbrella.

They never saw the poet again. This one, that is. Because this happened almost six months ago, and they still live there. But they never saw this one. Three days later, Anne gets the second letter, mailed from the village. It is a menu card from the Elite Café, or maybe they call it the Palace. It was already autographed by the flies that eat there, and the poet had written on the back of it. Anne left it on Roger's desk and went out, and then Roger read it.

It seems that this was the shot. The one that Roger had always claimed to be waiting for. Anyway, the magazines that don't have any pictures took the poem, stealing it from one another while the interest or whatever it was ate up the

money that the poet never got for it. But that was all right, too, because by that time Blair was dead.

Amos Crain's wife told them how the poet had left town. And a week later Anne left too. She went up to Connecticut to spend the rest of the summer with her mother and father, where the children were. The last thing she heard when she left the house was the typewriter.

But it was two weeks after Anne left before Roger finished it, wrote the last word. At first he wanted to put the poem in too, this poem on the menu card that wasn't about freedom, either, but he didn't. Conscience, maybe he called it, put over the old haymaker, and Roger took it standing, like a little man, and sent off the poem for the magazines to jaw over, and tied up the papers he had written and sent them off too. And what was it he had been writing? Him, and Anne, and the poet. Word for word, between the waiting spells to find out what to write down next, with a few changes here and there, of course, because live people do not make good copy, the most interesting copy being gossip, since it mostly is not true.

So he bundled the pages up and sent them off and they sent him the money. It came just in time, because the winter was coming and he still owed a balance on Blair's hospital and funeral. So he paid that, and with the rest of the money he bought Anne a fur coat and himself and the children some winter underwear.

Blair died in September. Anne and the children were still away when he got the wire, three or four days late, since the next batch of them had not arrived yet. So here he is, sitting at his desk, in the empty house, with the typewriting all finished, holding the wire in his hand. "Shelley," he says. "His whole life was a not very successful imitation of itself. Even to the amount of water it took."

He didn't tell Anne about the poet until after the fur coat came. "Did you see that he . . ." Anne said.

"Yes. He had a nice room, in the sun. A good nurse. The doctor didn't want him to have a special nurse at first. Damn butcher."

Sometimes when a man thinks about them making poets and artists and such pay these taxes which they say indicates that a man is free, twenty-one, and capable of taking care of himself in this close competition, it seems like they are obtaining money under false pretenses. Anyway, here's the rest of it, what they did next.

He reads the book, the story, to her, and her not saying anything until he had finished. "So that's what you were doing," she said.

He doesn't look at her, either; he is busy evening the pages, getting them smooth again. "It's your fur coat," he said.

"Oh," she says. "Yes. My fur coat."

So the fur coat comes. And what does she do then? She gave it away. Yes. Gave it to Mrs. Crain. Gave it to her, and her in the kitchen, churning, with her hair in her face, brushing her hair back with a wrist that looked like a lean ham. "Why, Miz Howes," she says. "I caint. I recly caint."

"You'll have to take it," Anne says. "We—I got it under false pretenses. I don't deserve it. You put bread into the ground and reap it; I don't. So I can't wear a coat like this."

And they leave it there with Mrs. Crain and they go back home, walking. Only they stop in broad daylight, with Mrs. Crain watching them from the window, and go into a clinch on their own account. "I feel better," Anne says.

"So do I," Roger says. "Because Blair wasn't there to see Mrs. Crain's face when you gave her that coat. No freedom there, or equality either."

But Anne is not listening. "Not to think," she says, "that he . . . to dress me in the skins of little slain beasts. . . . You put him in a book, but you didn't finish it. You didn't know about that coat, did you? God beat you, that time, Roger."

"Ay," Roger says. "God beats me lots of times. But there's one thing about it. Their children are bigger than ours, and even Mrs. Crain can't wear my underclothes. So that's all right."

Sure. That was all right. Because it was Christmas soon, and then spring; and then summer, the long summer, the long days.

The Brooch

I

THE TELEPHONE waked him. He waked already hurrying, fumbling in the dark for robe and slippers, because he knew before waking that the bed beside his own was still empty, and the instrument was downstairs just opposite the door beyond which his mother had lain propped upright in bed for five years, and he knew on waking that he would be too late because she would already have heard it, just as she heard everything that happened at any hour in the house.

She was a widow, he the only child. When he went away to college she went with him; she kept a house in Charlottesville, Virginia, for four years while he graduated. She was the daughter of a well-to-do merchant. Her husband had been a travelling man who came one summer to the town with letters of introduction: one to a minister, the other to her father. Three months later the travelling man and the daughter were married. His name was Boyd. He resigned his position within the year and moved into his wife's house and spent his days sitting in front of the hotel with the lawyers and the cotton-planters—a dark man with a gallant swaggering way of removing his hat to ladies. In the second year, the son was born. Six months later, Boyd departed. He just went away, leaving a note to his wife in which he told her that he could no longer bear to lie in bed at night and watch her rolling onto empty spools the string saved

from parcels from the stores. His wife never heard of him again, though she refused to let her father have the marriage annulled and change the son's name.

Then the merchant died, leaving all his property to the daughter and the grandson who, though he had been out of Fauntleroy suits since he was seven or eight, at twelve wore even on weekdays clothes which made him look not like a child but like a midget; he probably could not have long associated with other children even if his mother had let him. In due time the mother found a boys' school where the boy could wear a round jacket and a man's hard hat with impunity, though by the time the two of them removed to Charlottesville for these next four years, the son did not look like a midget. He looked now like a character out of Dante—a man a little slighter than his father but with something of his father's dark handsomeness, who hurried with averted head, even when his mother was not with him, past the young girls on the streets not only of Charlottesville but of the little lost Mississippi hamlet to which they presently returned, with an expression of face like the young monks or angels in fifteenth-century allegories. Then his mother had her stroke, and presently the mother's friends brought to her bed reports of almost exactly the sort of girl which perhaps even the mother might have expected the son to become not only involved with but to marry.

Her name was Amy, daughter of a railroad conductor who had been killed in a wreck. She lived now with an aunt who kept a boarding-house—a vivid, daring girl whose later reputation was due more to folly and the caste handicap of the little Southern town than to badness and which at the last was doubtless more smoke than fire; whose name, though she always had invitations to the more public dances, was a light word, especially among the older women, daughters

of decaying old houses like this in which her future husband had been born.

So presently the son had acquired some skill in entering the house and passing the door beyond which his mother lay propped in bed, and mounting the stairs in the dark to his own room. But one night he failed to do so. When he entered the house the transom above his mother's door was dark, as usual, and even if it had not been he could not have known that this was the afternoon on which the mother's friends had called and told her about Amy, and that his mother had lain for five hours, propped bolt upright, in the darkness, watching the invisible door. He entered quietly as usual, his shoes in his hand, yet he had not even closed the front door when she called his name. Her voice was not raised. She called his name once:

"Howard."

He opened the door. As he did so the lamp beside her bed came on. It sat on a table beside the bed; beside it sat a clock with a dead face; to stop it had been the first act of his mother when she could move her hands two years ago. He approached the bed from which she watched him—a thick woman with a face the color of tallow and dark eyes apparently both pupil-less and iris-less beneath perfectly white hair. "What?" he said. "Are you sick?"

"Come closer," she said. He came nearer. They looked at one another. Then he seemed to know; perhaps he had been expecting it.

"I know who's been talking to you," he said. "Those damned old buzzards."

"I'm glad to hear it's carrion," she said. "Now I can rest easy that you won't bring it into our house."

"Go on. Say, your house."

"Not necessary. Any house where a lady lives." They looked at one another in the steady lamp which possessed

that stale glow of sickroom lights. "You are a man. I don't reproach you. I am not even surprised. I just want to warn you before you make yourself ridiculous. Don't confuse the house with the stable."

"With the—Hah!" he said. He stepped back and jerked the door open with something of his father's swaggering theatricalism. "With your permission," he said. He did not close the door. She lay bolt upright on the pillows and looked into the dark hall and listened to him go to the telephone, call the girl, and ask her to marry him tomorrow. Then he reappeared at the door. "With your permission," he said again, with that swaggering reminiscence of his father, closing the door. After a while the mother turned the light off. It was daylight in the room then.

They were not married the next day, however. "I'm scared to," Amy said. "I'm scared of your mother. What does she say about me?"

"I don't know. I never talk to her about you."

"You don't even tell her you love me?"

"What does it matter? Let's get married."

"And live there with her?" They looked at one another. "Will you go to work, get us a house of our own?"

"What for? I have enough money. And it's a big house."

"Her house. Her money."

"It'll be mine—ours some day. Please."

"Come on. Let's try to dance again." This was in the parlor of the boarding-house, where she was trying to teach him to dance, but without success. The music meant nothing to him; the noise of it or perhaps the touch of her body destroyed what little co-ordination he could have had. But he took her to the Country Club dances; they were known to be engaged. Yet she still staid out dances with other men, in the parked cars about the dark lawn. He tried to argue with her about it, and about drinking.

"Sit out and drink with me, then," he said.

"We're engaged. It's no fun with you."

"Yes," he said, with the docility with which he accepted each refusal; then he stopped suddenly and faced her. "What's no fun with me?" She fell back a little as he gripped her shoulder. "What's no fun with me?"

"Oh," she said. "You're hurting me!"

"I know it. What's no fun with me?"

Then another couple came up and he let her go. Then an hour later, during an intermission, he dragged her, screaming and struggling, out of a dark car and across the dance floor, empty now and lined with chaperones like a theater audience, and drew out a chair and took her across his lap and spanked her. By daylight they had driven twenty miles to another town and were married.

That morning Amy called Mrs. Boyd "Mother" for the first and (except one, and that perhaps shocked out of her by surprise or perhaps by exultation), last time, though the same day Mrs. Boyd formally presented Amy with the brooch: an ancient, clumsy thing, yet valuable. Amy carried it back to their room, and he watched her stand looking at it, perfectly cold, perfectly inscrutable. Then she put it into a drawer. She held it over the open drawer with two fingers and released it and then drew the two fingers across her thigh.

"You will have to wear it sometimes," Howard said.

"Oh, I will. I'll show my gratitude. Don't worry." Presently it seemed to him that she took pleasure in wearing it. That is, she began to wear it quite often. Then he realized that it was not pleasure but vindictive incongruity; she wore it for an entire week once on the bosom of a gingham house dress, an apron. But she always wore it where Mrs. Boyd would see it, always when she and Howard had dressed to

go out and would stop in the mother's room to say good night.

They lived upstairs, where, a year later, their child was born. They took the child down for Mrs. Boyd to see it. She turned her head on the pillows and looked at the child once. "Ah," she said. "I never saw Amy's father, that I know of. But then, I never travelled on a train a great deal."

"The old—the old—" Amy cried, shuddering and clinging to Howard. "Why does she hate me so? What have I ever done to her? Let's move. You can work."

"No. She won't live always."

"Yes, she will. She'll live forever, just to hate me."

"No," Howard said. In the next year the child died. Again Amy tried to get him to move.

"Anywhere. I won't care how we have to live."

"No. I can't leave her helpless on her back. You will have to start going out again. Dance. Then it won't be so bad."

"Yes," she said, quieter. "I'll have to. I can't stand this."

One said "you," the other, "I." Neither of them said "we." So, on Saturday nights Amy would dress and Howard would put on scarf and overcoat, sometimes over his shirt-sleeves, and they would descend the stairs and stop at Mrs. Boyd's door and then Howard would put Amy into the car and watch her drive away. Then he would re-enter the house and with his shoes in his hand return up the stairs, as he had used to do before they married, slipping past the lighted transom. Just before midnight, in the overcoat and scarf again, he would slip back down the stairs and past the still lighted transom and be waiting on the porch when Amy drove up. Then they would enter the house and look into Mrs. Boyd's room and say good night.

One night it was one o'clock before she returned. He had been waiting for an hour in slippers and pajamas on the

porch; it was November. The transom above Mrs. Boyd's door was dark and they did not stop.

"Some jelly beans set the clock back," she said. She did not look at him, dragging her clothes off, flinging the brooch along with her other jewelry onto the dressing table. "I had hoped you wouldn't be fool enough to stand out there and wait for me."

"Maybe next time they set the clock back I won't."

She stopped, suddenly and perfectly still, looking at him over her shoulder. "Do you mean that?" she said. He was not looking at her; he heard, felt, her approach and stand beside him. Then she touched his shoulder. "Howard?" she said. He didn't move. Then she was clinging to him, flung onto his lap, crying wildly: "What's happening to us?" striking herself against him with a wild abandon: "What is it? What is it?" He held her quiet, though after they were each in their beds (they already had two of them) he heard and then felt her cross the intervening gap and fling herself against him again with that wild terrified abandon not of a woman but of a child in the dark, enveloping him, whispering: "You don't *have* to trust me, Howard! You can! You can! You don't *have* to!"

"Yes," he said. "I know. It's all right. It's all right." So after that, just before twelve, he would put on the overcoat and scarf, creep down the stairs and past the lighted transom, open and close the front door noisily, and then open his mother's door where the mother would be propped high on the pillows, the book open and face down on her knees.

"Back already?" Mrs. Boyd would say.

"Yes. Amy's gone on up. Do you want anything?"

"No. Good night."

"Good night."

Then he would go up and go to bed, and after a time (sometimes) to sleep. But before this sometimes. taking it

sometimes into sleep with him, he would think, tell himself with that quiet and fatalistic pessimism of the impotent intelligent: *But this cannot go on forever. Some night something is going to happen; she is going to catch Amy. And I know what she is going to do. But what am I going to do?* He believed that he did know. That is, the top of his mind assured him that it knew, but he discounted this; the intelligence again: not to bury it, flee from it: just discounting it, the intelligence speaking out of the impotence: *Because no man ever knows what he will do in any given situation, set of circumstances: the wise, others perhaps, drawing conclusions, but never himself.* The next morning Amy would be in the other bed, and then, in the light of day, it would be gone. But now and then, even by daylight, it returned and he from the detachment of his cerebration contemplating his life, that faulty whole whose third the two of them had produced yet whose lack the two of them could not fill, telling himself, *Yes. I know what she will do and I know what Amy will ask me to do and I know that I will not do that. But what will I do?* but not for long, telling himself now that it had not happened so far, and that anyway it was six long days until Saturday: the impotence now, not even the intellect.

II

So it was that when he waked to the bell's shrilling he already knew that the bed beside his own was still empty, just as he knew that, no matter how quickly he reached the telephone, it would already be too late. He did not even wait for his slippers; he ran down the now icy stairs, seeing the transom above his mother's door come alight as he passed it and went to the phone and took the receiver down: "Oh, Howard, I'm so sorry—this is Martha Ross—so sorry to dis-

turb you, but I knew that Amy would be anxious about it. I found it in the car, tell her, when we got back home."

"Yes," he said. "In the car."

"In our car. After she lost her switch key and we brought her home, to the corner. We tried to get her to come on home with us and have some ham and eggs, but she—" Then the voice died away. He held the cold receiver to his ear and heard the other end of the wire, the silence, fill with a sort of consternation like an indrawn breath: something instinctive and feminine and self-protective. But the pause itself was hardly a pause; almost immediately the voice went on, though completely changed now, blank, smooth, reserved: "Amy's in bed, I suppose."

"Yes. She's in bed."

"Oh. So sorry I bothered you, got you up. But I knew she would be anxious about it, since it was your mother's, the family piece. But of course, if she hasn't missed it yet, you won't need to bother her." The wire hummed, tense, "That I called or anything." The wire hummed. "Hello. Howard?"

"No," he said. "I won't bother her tonight. You can call her in the morning."

"Yes, I will. So sorry I bothered you. I hope I didn't wake your mother."

He put the receiver back. He was cold. He could feel his bare toes curling back from the icelike floor as he stood looking at the blank door beyond which his mother would be sitting, high-propped on the pillows, with her tallow face and dark inscrutable eyes and the hair which Amy said resembled weathered cotton, beside the clock whose hands she had stopped herself at ten minutes to four on the afternoon five years ago when she first moved again. When he opened the door his picture had been exact, almost to the position of the hands even.

"She is not in this house," Mrs. Boyd said.

"Yes. She's in bed. You know when we came in. She just left one of her rings with Martha Ross tonight and Martha telephoned."

But apparently she had not even listened to him. "So you swear she is in this house this minute."

"Yes. Of course she is. She's asleep, I tell you."

"Then send her down here to say good night to me."

"Nonsense. Of course I won't."

They looked at one another across the bed's footboard.

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

They looked at one another a moment longer. Then he began to turn away; he could feel her watching him. "Then tell me something else. It was the brooch she lost."

He did not answer this either. He just looked at her again as he closed the door: the two of them curiously similar, mortal and implacable foes in the fierce close antipathy of blood. He went out.

He returned to the bedroom and turned on the light and found his slippers and went to the fire and put some coal on the embers and punched and prodded it into flame. The clock on the mantel said twenty minutes to one. Presently he had a fair blaze; he had quit shivering. He went back to bed and turned off the light, leaving only the firelight pulsing and gleaming on the furniture and among the phials and mirrors of the dressing table, and in the smaller mirror above his own chest of drawers, upon which sat the three silver photograph frames, the two larger ones containing himself and Amy, the smaller one between them empty. He just lay. He was not thinking at all. He had just thought once, quietly, *So that's that. So now I suppose I will know, find out what I am going to do* and then no more, not even thinking that again.

The house seemed still to be filled with the shrill sound of the telephone like a stubborn echo. Then he began to hear the clock on the mantel, reiterant, cold, not loud. He turned on the light and took up the book face down and open from the table beside his pillow, but he found that he could not keep his mind on the words for the sound which the clock made, so he rose and went to the mantel. The hands were now at half past two. He stopped the clock and turned its face to the wall and brought his book to the fire and found that he could now keep his mind on the words, the sense, reading on now untroubled by time. So he could not have said just when it was that he found he had ceased to read, had jerked his head up. He had heard no sound, yet he knew that Amy was in the house. He did not know how he knew: he just sat holding his breath, immobile, the peaceful book raised and motionless, waiting. Then he heard Amy say, "It's me, Mother."

She said "Mother," he thought, not moving yet. *She called her "Mother" again.* He moved now, putting the book carefully down, his place marked, but as he crossed the room he walked naturally, not trying to deaden his footsteps, to the door and opened it and saw Amy just emerging from Mrs. Boyd's room. She began to mount the stairs, walking naturally too, her hard heels sharp and unnaturally loud in the nightbound house. She must have stooped when Mother called her and put her slippers on again, he thought. She had not seen him yet, mounting steadily, her face in the dim hall light vague and petal-like against the collar of her fur coat, projecting already ahead of her to where he waited a sort of rosy and crystal fragrance of the frozen night out of which she had just emerged. Then she saw him at the head of the stairs. For just a second, an instant, she stopped dead still, though she was moving again before it could have been called pause, already speaking as she passed him where he

stood aside, and entered the bedroom: "Is it very late? I was with the Rosses. They just let me out at the corner; I lost my car key out at the club. Maybe it was the car that waked her."

"No. She was already awake. It was the telephone."

She went on to the fire and spread her hands to it, still in her coat; she did not seem to have heard him, her face rosy in the firelight, her presence emanating that smell of cold, that frosty fragrance which had preceded her up the stairs: "I suppose so. Her light was already on. I knew as soon as I opened the front door that we were sunk. I hadn't even got in the house good when she said 'Amy' and I said 'It's me, Mother' and she said, 'Come in here, please,' and there she was with those eyes that haven't got any edges to them and that hair that looks like somebody pulled it out of the middle of a last year's cotton bale, and she said, 'Of course you understand that you will have to leave this house at once. Good night.'"

"Yes," he said. "She has been awake since about half past twelve. But there wasn't anything to do but insist that you were already in bed asleep and trust to luck."

"You mean, she hasn't been asleep at all?"

"No. It was the telephone, like I told you. About half past twelve."

With her hands still spread to the fire she glanced at him over her furred shoulder, her face rosy, her eyes at once bright and heavy, like a woman's eyes after pleasure, with 'a kind of inattentive conspiratorial commiseration. "Telephone? Here? At half past twelve? What absolutely putrid—But no matter." She turned now, facing him, as if she had only been waiting until she became warm, the rich coat open upon the fragile glitter of her dress; there was a quality actually beautiful about her now—not of the face whose impeccable replica looks out from the covers of a thousand

magazines each month, nor of the figure, the shape of deliberately epicene provocation into which the miles of celluloid film have constricted the female body of an entire race; but a quality completely female in the old eternal fashion, primitive assured and ruthless as she approached him, already raising her arms. "Yes! I say luck too!" she said, putting her arms around him, her upper body leaned back to look into his face, her own face triumphant, the smell now warm woman-odor where the frosty fragrance had thawed. "She said at once, now. So we can go. You see? Do you understand? We can leave now. Give her the money, let her have it all. We won't care. You can find work; I won't care how and where we will have to live. You don't have to stay here now, with her now. She has—what do you call it? absolved you herself. Only I have lost the car key. But no matter: we can walk. Yes, walk; with nothing, taking nothing of hers, like we came here."

"Now?" he said. "Tonight?"

"Yes! She said at once. So it will have to be tonight."

"No," he said. That was all, no indication of which question he had answered, which denied. But then, he did not need to because she still held him; it was only the expression of her face that changed. It did not die yet nor even become terrified yet: it just became unbelieving, like a child's incredulity. "You mean, you still won't go? You still won't leave her? That you would just take me to the hotel for tonight and that you will come back here tomorrow? Or do you mean you won't even stay at the hotel with me tonight? That you will take me there and leave me and then you—" She held him, staring at him; she began to say, "Wait, wait. There must be some reason, something—Wait," she cried; "wait! You said, telephone. At half past twelve." She still stared at him, her hands hard, her pupils like pinpoints, her face ferocious. "That's it. That's the

reason. Who was it that telephoned here about me? Tell me! I defy you to! I will explain it. Tell me!"

"It was Martha Ross. She said she had just let you out at the corner."

"She lied!" she cried at once, immediately, scarce waiting to hear the name. "She lied! They did bring me home then but it was still early and so I decided to go on with them to their house and have some ham and eggs. So I called to Frank before he got turned around and I went with them. Frank will prove it! She lied! They just this minute put me out at the corner!"

She looked at him. They stared at one another for a full immobile moment. Then he said, "Then where is the brooch?"

"The brooch?" she said. "What brooch?" But already he had seen her hand move upward beneath the coat; besides, he could see her face and watch it gape like that of a child which has lost its breath before she began to cry with a wild yet immobile abandon, so that she spoke through the weeping in the choked gasping of a child, with complete and despairing surrender: "Oh, Howard! I wouldn't have done that to you! I wouldn't have! I wouldn't have!"

"All right," he said. "Hush, now. Hush, Amy. She will hear you."

"All right. I'm trying to." But she still faced him with that wrung and curiously rigid face beneath its incredible flow of moisture, as though not the eyes but all the pores had sprung at once; now she too spoke directly out of thinking, without mention of subject or circumstance, nothing more of defiance or denial: "Would you have gone with me if you hadn't found out?"

"No. Not even then. I won't leave her. I will not, until she is dead. Or this house. I won't. I can't. I—" They looked at one another, she staring at him as if she saw reflected in

his pupils not herself but the parchment-colored face below stairs—the piled dirty white hair, the fierce implacable eyes—her own image blanked out by something beyond mere blindness: by a quality determined, invincible, and crucified.

“Yes,” she said. From somewhere she produced a scrap of chiffon and began to dab at her eyes, delicately, even now by instinct careful of the streaked mascara. “She beat us. She lay there in that bed and beat us.” She turned and went to the closet and drew out an overnight bag and put the crystal objects from the dressing-table into it and opened a drawer. “I can’t take everything tonight. I will have to —”

He moved also; from the chest of drawers where the small empty photograph frame sat he took his wallet and removed the bills from it and returned and put the money into her hand. “I don’t think there is very much here. But you won’t need money until tomorrow.”

“Yes,” she said. “You can send the rest of my things then, too.”

“Yes,” he said. She folded and smoothed the notes in her fingers; she was not looking at him. He did not know what she was looking at except it was not at the money. “Haven’t you got a purse or something to carry it in?”

“Yes,” she said. But she did not stop folding and smoothing the bills, still not looking at them, apparently not aware of them, as if they had no value and she had merely picked them idly up without being aware of it. “Yes,” she said. “She beat us. She lay there in that bed she will never move from until they come in and carry her out some day, and took that brooch and beat us both.” Then she began to cry. It was as quiet now as the way she had spoken. “My little baby,” she said. “My dear little baby.”

He didn’t even say Hush now. He just waited until she dried her eyes again, almost briskly, rousing, looking at him

with an expression almost like smiling, her face, the make-up, the careful evening face haggard and streaked and filled with the weary and peaceful aftermath of tears. "Well," she said. "It's late." She stooped, but he anticipated her and took the bag; they descended the stairs together; they could see the lighted transom above Mrs. Boyd's door.

"It's too bad you haven't got the car," he said.

"Yes. I lost the key at the club. But I telephoned the garage. They will bring it in in the morning."

They stopped in the hall while he telephoned for a cab. Then they waited, talking quietly now and then. "You had better go straight to bed."

"Yes. I'm tired. I danced a good deal."

"What was the music? Was it good?"

"Yes. I don't know. I suppose so. When you are dancing yourself, you don't usually notice whether the music is or isn't."

"Yes, I guess that's so." Then the car came. They went out to it, he in pajamas and robe; the earth was frozen and iron-hard, the sky bitter and brilliant. He helped her in.

"Now you run back into the house," she said. "You didn't even put on your overcoat."

"Yes. I'll get your things to the hotel early."

"Not too early. Run, now." She had already sat back, the coat close about her. He had already remarked how sometime, at some moment back in the bedroom, the warm woman-odor had congealed again and that she now emanated once more that faint frosty fragrance, fragile, impermanent and forlorn; the car moved away, he did not look back. As he was closing the front door his mother called his name. But he did not pause or even glance toward the door. He just mounted the stairs, out of the dead, level, unsleeping, peremptory voice. The fire had burned down: a strong rosy glow, peaceful and quiet and warmly reflected from mirror

and polished wood. The book still lay, face down and open, in the chair. He took it up and went to the table between the two beds and sought and found the cellophane envelope which had once contained pipe cleaners, which he used for a bookmark, and marked his place and put the book down. It was the coat-pocket size, Modern Library *Green Mansions*. He had discovered the book during adolescence; he had read it ever since. During that period he read only the part about the journey of the three people in search of the Riolama which did not exist, seeking this part out and reading it in secret as the normal boy would have normal and conventional erotica or obscenity, mounting the barren mountain with Rima toward the cave, not knowing then that it was the cave-symbol which he sought, escaping it at last through the same desire and need to flee and escape which Rima had, following her on past the cave to where she poised, not even waiting for him, impermanent as a match flame and as weak, in the cold and ungrieving moon. In his innocence then he believed, with a sort of urgent and despairing joy, that the mystery about her was not mystery since it was physical: that she was corporeally impenetrable, incomplete; with peaceful despair justifying, vindicating, what he was through (so he believed) no fault of his own, with what he read in books, as the young do. But after his marriage he did not read the book again until the child died and the Saturday nights began. And then he avoided the journey to Riolama as he had used to seek it out. Now he read only where Abel (the one man on earth who knew that he was alone) wandered in the impervious and interdict forest filled with the sound of birds. Then he went to the chest and opened again the drawer where he kept the wallet and stood for a moment, his hand still lying on the edge of the drawer. "Yes," he said quietly, aloud: "it seems to have been right all the time about what I will do."

The bathroom was at the end of the hall, built onto the house later, warm too where he had left the electric heater on for Amy and they had forgot it. It was here that he kept his whiskey also. He had begun to drink after his mother's stroke, in the beginning of what he had believed to be his freedom, and since the death of the child he had begun to keep a two-gallon keg of corn whiskey in the bathroom. Although it was detached from the house proper and the whole depth of it from his mother's room, he nevertheless stuffed towels carefully about and beneath the door, and then removed them and returned to the bedroom and took the down coverlet from Amy's bed and returned and stuffed the door again and then hung the coverlet before it. But even then he was not satisfied. He stood there, thoughtful, musing, a little pudgy (he had never taken any exercise since he gave up trying to learn to dance, and now what with the steady drinking, there was little of the young Italian novice about his figure any more), the pistol hanging from his hand. He began to look about. His glance fell upon the bath mat folded over the edge of the tub. He wrapped his hand, pistol and all, in the mat and pointed it toward the rear wall and fired it, the report muffled and jarring though not loud. Yet even now he stood and listened as if he expected to hear from this distance. But he heard nothing; even when, the door freed again, he moved quietly down the hall and then down the steps to where he could see clearly the dark transom above his mother's door. But again he did not pause. He returned up the stairs, quietly, hearing the cold and impotent ratiocination without listening to it: *Like your father, you cannot seem to live with either of them, but unlike your father you cannot seem to live without them*; telling himself quietly, "Yes, it seems that it was right. It seems to have known us better than I did," and he shut the bathroom door again and stuffed the towels care-

fully about and beneath it. But he did not hang the coverlet this time. He drew it over himself, squatting, huddling into it, the muzzle of the pistol between his teeth like a pipe, wadding the thick soft coverlet about his head, hurrying, moving swiftly now because he was already beginning to suffocate.

My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and The Battle of Harrykin Creek

I

IT WOULD BE right after supper, before we had left the table. At first, beginning with the day the news came that the Yankees had taken Memphis, we did it three nights in succession. But after that, as we got better and better and faster and faster, once a week suited Granny. Then after Cousin Melisandre finally got out of Memphis and came to live with us, it would be just once a month, and when the regiment in Virginia voted Father out of the colonelcy and he came home and stayed three months while he made a crop and got over his mad and organized his cavalry troop for General Forrest's command, we quit doing it at all. That is, we did it one time with Father there too, watching, and that night Ringo and I heard him laughing in the library, the first time he had laughed since he came home, until in about a half a minute Granny came out already holding her skirts up and went sailing up the stairs. So we didn't do it any more until Father had organized his troop and was gone again.

Granny would fold her napkin beside her plate. She would speak to Ringo standing behind her chair without even turning her head:

"Go call Joby and Lucius."

And Ringo would go back through the kitchen without stopping. He would just say, "All right. Look out," at Lou-

vinia's back and go to the cabin and come back with not only Joby and Lucius and the lighted lantern but Philadelphia too, even though Philadelphia wasn't going to do anything but stand and watch and then follow to the orchard and back to the house until Granny said we were done for that time and she and Lucius could go back home to bed. And we would bring down from the attic the big trunk (we had done it so many times by now that we didn't even need the lantern any more to go to the attic and get the trunk) whose lock it was my job to oil every Monday morning with a feather dipped in chicken fat, and Louvinia would come in from the kitchen with the unwashed silver from supper in a dishpan under one arm and the kitchen clock under the other and set the clock and the dishpan on the table and take from her apron pocket a pair of Granny's rolled-up stockings and hand them to Granny and Granny would unroll the stockings and take from the toe of one of them a wadded rag and open the rag and take out the key to the trunk and unpin her watch from her bosom and fold it into the rag and put the rag back into the stocking and roll the stockings back into a ball and put the ball into the trunk. Then with Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia watching, and Father too on that one time when he was there, Granny would stand facing the clock, her hands raised and about eight inches apart and her neck bowed so she could watch the clock-face over her spectacles, until the big hand reached the nearest hour-mark.

The rest of us watched her hands. She wouldn't speak again. She didn't need to. There would be just the single light loud pop of her palms when the hand came to the nearest hour-mark; sometimes we would be already moving, even before her hands came together, all of us that is except Philadelphia. Granny wouldn't let her help at all, because of Lucius, even though Lucius had done nearly all the digging of the pit and did most of the carrying of the trunk each time.

But Philadelphia had to be there. Granny didn't have to tell her but once. "I want the wives of all the free men here too," Granny said. "I want all of you free folks to watch what the rest of us that aint free have to do to keep that way."

That began about eight months ago. One day even I realized that something had happened to Lucius. Then I knew that Ringo had already seen it and that he knew what it was, so that when at last Louvinia came and told Granny, it was not as if Lucius had dared his mother to tell her but as if he had actually forced somebody, he didn't care who, to tell her. He had said it more than once, in the cabin one night probably for the first time, then after that in other places and to other people, to Negroes from other plantations even. Memphis was already gone then, and New Orleans, and all we had left of the River was Vicksburg and although we didn't believe it then, we wouldn't have that long. Then one morning Louvinia came in where Granny was cutting down the worn-out uniform pants Father had worn home from Virginia so they would fit me, and told Granny how Lucius was saying that soon the Yankees would have all of Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha County too and all the niggers would be free and that when that happened, he was going to be long gone. Lucius was working in the garden that morning. Granny went out to the back gallery, still carrying the pants and the needle. She didn't even push her spectacles up. She said, "You, Lucius," just once, and Lucius came out of the garden with the hoe and Granny stood looking down at him over the spectacles as she looked over them at everything she did, from reading or sewing to watching the clock-face until the instant came to start burying the silver.

"You can go now," she said. "You needn't wait on the Yankees."

"Go?" Lucius said. "I aint free."

"You've been free for almost three minutes," Granny said. "Go on."

Lucius blinked his eyes while you could have counted about ten. "Go where?" he said.

"I can't tell you," Granny said. "I aint free. I would imagine you will have all Yankeedom to move around in."

Lucius blinked his eyes. He didn't look at Granny now. "Was that all you wanted?" he said.

"Yes," Granny said. So he went back to the garden. And that was the last we heard about being free from him. That is, it quit showing in the way he acted, and if he talked any more of it, even Louvinia never thought it was worth bothering Granny with. It was Granny who would do the reminding of it, especially to Philadelphia, especially on the nights when we would stand like race-horses at the barrier, watching Granny's hands until they clapped together.

Each one of us knew exactly what he was to do. I would go upstairs for Granny's gold harpin and her silver-headed umbrella and her plumed Sunday hat because she had already sent her ear-rings and brooch to Richmond a long time ago, and to Father's room for his silver-backed brushes and to Cousin Melisandre's room after she came to live with us for her things because the one time Granny let Cousin Melisandre try to help too, Cousin Melisandre brought all her dresses down. Ringo would go to the parlor for the candlesticks and Granny's dulcimer and the medallion of Father's mother back in Carolina. And we would run back to the dining-room where Louvinia and Lucius would have the side-board almost cleared, and Granny still standing there and watching the clock-face and the trunk both now with her hands ready to pop again and they would pop and Ringo and I would stop at the cellar door just long enough to snatch up the shovels and run on to the orchard and snatch the brush and grass and the criss-crossed sticks away and have the pit

open and ready by the time we saw them coming: first Louvinia with the lantern, then Joby and Lucius with the trunk and Granny walking beside it and Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia (and on that one time Father, walking along and laughing) following behind. And on that first night, the kitchen clock wasn't in the trunk. Granny was carrying it, while Louvinia held the lantern so that Granny could watch the hand, Granny made us put the trunk into the pit and shovel the dirt back and smooth it off and lay the brush and grass back over it again and then dig up the trunk and carry it back to the house. And one night, it seemed like we had been bringing the trunk down from the attic and putting the silver into it and carrying it out to the pit and uncovering the pit and then covering the pit again and turning around and carrying the trunk back to the house and taking the silver out and putting it back where we got it from all winter and all summer too;—that night, and I don't know who thought of it first, maybe it was all of us at once. But anyway the clock-hand had passed four hour-marks before Granny's hands even popped for Ringo and me to run and open the pit. And they came with the trunk and Ringo and I hadn't even put down the last armful of brush and sticks, to save having to stoop to pick it up again, and Lucius hadn't even put down his end of the trunk for the same reason and I reckon Louvinia was the only one that knew what was coming next because Ringo and I didn't know that the kitchen clock was still sitting on the dining-room table. Then Granny spoke. It was the first time we had ever heard her speak between when she would tell Ringo, "Go call Joby and Lucius," and then tell us both about thirty minutes later: "Wash your feet and go to bed." It was not loud and not long, just two words: "Bury it." And we lowered the trunk into the pit and Joby and Lucius threw the dirt back in and even then Ringo and I didn't move with the brush until Granny spoke

again, not loud this time either: "Go on. Hide the pit." And we put the brush back and Granny said, "Dig it up." And we dug up the trunk and carried it back into the house and put the things back where we got them from and that was when I saw the kitchen clock still sitting on the dining-room table. And we all stood there watching Granny's hands until they popped together and that time we filled the trunk and carried it out to the orchard and lowered it into the pit quicker than we had ever done before.

II

AND THEN when the time came to really bury the silver, it was too late. After it was all over and Cousin Melisandre and Cousin Philip were finally married and Father had got done laughing, Father said that always happened when a heterogeneous collection of people who were cohered simply by an uncomplex will for freedom engaged with a tyrannous machine. He said they would always lose the first battles, and if they were outnumbered and outweighed enough, it would seem to an outsider that they were going to lose them all. But they would not. They could not be defeated; if they just willed that freedom strongly and completely enough to sacrifice all else for it—ease and comfort and fatness of spirit and all, until whatever it was they had left would be enough, no matter how little it was—that very freedom itself would finally conquer the machine as a negative force like drouth or flood could strangle it. And later still, after two more years and we knew we were going to lose the war, he was still saying that. He said, "I won't see it but you will. You will see it in the next war, and in all the wars Americans will have to fight from then on. There will be men from the South in the forefront of all the battles, even leading some of them, helping those who conquered us defend that same freedom

which they believed they had taken from us." And that happened: thirty years later, and General Wheeler, whom Father would have called apostate, commanding in Cuba, and whom old General Early did call apostate and matricide too in the office of the Richmond editor when he said: "I would like to have lived so that when my time comes, I will see Robert Lee again. But since I haven't, I'm certainly going to enjoy watching the devil burn that blue coat off Joe Wheeler."

We didn't have time. We didn't even know there were any Yankees in Jefferson, let alone within a mile of Sartoris. There never had been many. There was no railroad then and no river big enough for big boats and nothing in Jefferson they would have wanted even if they had come, since this was before Father had had time to worry them enough for General Grant to issue a general order with a reward for his capture. So we had got used to the war. We thought of it as being definitely fixed and established as a railroad or a river is, moving east along the railroad from Memphis and south along the River toward Vicksburg. We had heard tales of Yankee pillage and most of the people around Jefferson stayed ready to bury their silver fast too, though I don't reckon any of them practiced doing it like we did. But nobody we knew was even kin to anyone who had been pillaged, and so I don't think that even Lucius really expected any Yankees until that morning.

It was about eleven o'clock. The table was already set for dinner and everybody was beginning to kind of ease up so we would be sure to hear when Louvinia went out to the back gallery and rang the bell, when Ab Snopes came in at a dead run, on a strange horse as usual. He was a member of Father's troop. Not a fighting member; he called himself father's horse-captain, whatever he meant by it, though we had a pretty good idea, and none of us at least knew what he

was doing in Jefferson when the troop was supposed to be up in Tennessee with General Bragg, and probably nobody anywhere knew the actual truth about how he got the horse, galloping across the yard and right through one of Granny's flower beds because I reckon he figured that carrying a message he could risk it, and on around to the back because he knew that, message or no message, he better not come to Granny's front door hollering that way, sitting that strange blown horse with a U.S. army brand on it you could read three hundred yards and yelling up at Granny that General Forrest was in Jefferson but there was a whole regiment of Yankee cavalry not a half a mile down the road.

So we never had time. Afterward Father admitted that Granny's error was not in strategy nor tactics either, even though she had copied from someone else. Because he said it had been a long time now since originality had been a component of military success. It just happened too fast. I went for Joby and Lucius and Philadelphia because Granny had already sent Ringo down to the road with a cup towel to wave when they came in sight. Then she sent me to the front window where I could watch Ringo. When Ab Snopes came back from hiding his new Yankee horse, he offered to go upstairs to get the things there. Granny had told us a long time ago never to let Ab Snopes go anywhere about the house unless somebody was with him. She said she would rather have Yankees in the house any day because at least Yankees would have more delicacy, even if it wasn't anything but good sense, than to steal a spoon or candlestick and then try to sell it to one of her own neighbors, as Ab Snopes would probably do. She didn't even answer him. She just said, "Stand over there by that door and be quiet." So Cousin Melisandre went upstairs after all and Granny and Philadelphia went to the parlor for the candlesticks and the medallion and the dulcimer, Philadelphia not only helping this time, free or not, but Granny wasn't even using the clock.

It just all happened at once. One second Ringo was sitting on the gate-post, looking up the road. The next second he was standing on it and waving the cup towel and then I was running and hollering, back to the dining-room, and I remember the whites of Joby's and Lucius's and Philadelphia's eyes and I remembered Cousin Melisandre's eyes where she leaned against the sideboard with the back of her hand against her mouth, and Granny and Louvinia and Ab Snopes glaring at one another across the trunk and I could hear Louvinia's voice even louder than mine:

"Miz Cawmpson! Miz Cawmpson!"

"What?" Granny cried. "What? Mrs. Compson?" Then we all remembered. It was when the first Yankee scouting patrol entered Jefferson over a year ago. The war was new then and I suppose General Compson was the only Jefferson soldier they had heard of yet. Anyway, the officer asked someone in the Square where General Compson lived and old Doctor Holston sent his Negro boy by back alleys and across lots to warn Mrs. Compson in time, and the story was how the Yankee officer sent some of his men through the empty house and himself rode around to the back where old Aunt Roxanne was standing in front of the outhouse behind the closed door of which Mrs. Compson was sitting, fully dressed even to her hat and parasol, on the wicker hamper containing her plate and silver. "Miss in dar," Roxanne said. "Stop where you is." And the story told how the Yankee officer said, "Excuse me," and raised his hat and even backed the horse a few steps before he turned and called his men and rode away. "The privy!" Granny cried.

"Hell fire, Miz Millard!" Ab Snopes said. And Granny never said anything. It wasn't like she didn't hear, because she was looking right at him. It was like she didn't care; that she might have even said it herself. And that shows how things were then: we just never had time for anything. "Hell fire," Ab Snopes said, "all north Mississippi has done heard

about that! There aint a white lady between here and Memphis that aint setting in the back house on a grip full of silver right this minute."

"Then we're already late," Granny said. "Hurry."

"Wait!" Ab Snopes said. "Wait! Even them Yankees have done caught onto that by now!"

"Then let's hope these are different Yankees," Granny said. "Hurry."

"But Miz Millard!" Ab Snopes cried. "Wait! Wait!"

But then we could hear Ringo yelling down at the gate and I remember Joby and Lucius and Philadelphia and Louvinia and the balloon-like swaying of Cousin Melisandre's skirts as they ran across the back yard, the trunk somewhere among them; I remember how Joby and Lucius tumbled the trunk into the little tall narrow flimsy sentry-box and Louvinia thrust Cousin Melisandre in and slammed the door and we could hear Ringo yelling good now, almost to the house, and then I was back at the front window and I saw them just as they swept around the house in a kind of straggling-clump—six men in blue, riding fast yet with something curious in the action of the horses, as if they were not only yoked together in spans but were hitched to a single wagon-tongue, then Ringo on foot running and not yelling now, and last of all the seventh rider, bareheaded and standing in his stirrups and with a sabre over his head. Then I was on the back gallery again, standing beside Granny above that moil of horses and men in the yard, and she was wrong. It was as if these were not only the same ones who had been at Mrs. Compson's last year, but somebody had even told them exactly where our outhouse was. The horses were yoked in pairs, but it was not a wagon-tongue, it was a pole, almost a log, twenty feet long, slung from saddle to saddle between the three span; and I remember the faces, unshaven and wan and not so much peering as frantically gleeful, glaring up at us

for an instant before the men leaped down and unslung the pole and jerked the horses aside and picked up the pole, three to a side, and began to run across the yard with it as the last rider came around the house, in gray (an officer: it was Cousin Philip, though of course we didn't know that then, and there was going to be a considerable more uproar and confusion before he finally became Cousin Philip and of course we didn't know that either), the sabre still lifted and not only standing in the stirrups but almost lying down along the horse's neck. The six Yankees never saw him. And we used to watch Father drilling his troop in the pasture, changing them from column to troop front at full gallop, and you could hear his voice even above the sound of the galloping hooves but it wasn't a bit louder than Granny's. "There's a lady in there!" she said. But the Yankees never heard her any more than they had seen Cousin Philip yet, the whole mass of them, the six men running with the pole and Cousin Philip on the horse, leaning out above them with a lifted sabre, rushing on across the yard until the end of the pole struck the outhouse door. It didn't just overturn, it exploded. One second it stood there, tall and narrow and flimsy; the next second it was gone and there was a boil of yelling men in blue coats darting and dodging around under Cousin Philip's horse and the flashing sabre until they could find a chance to turn and run. Then there was a scatter of planks and shingles and Cousin Melisandre sitting beside the trunk in the middle of it, in the spread of her hoops, her eyes shut and her mouth open, still screaming, and after a while a feeble popping of pistol-shots from down along the creek that didn't sound any more like war than a boy with firecrackers.

"I tried to tell you to wait!" Ab Snepes said behind us, "I tried to tell you them Yankees had done caught on!"

After Joby and Lucius and Ringo and I finished burying the trunk in the pit and hiding the shovel-marks, I found

Cousin Philip in the summer house. His sabre and belt were propped against the wall but I don't reckon even he knew what had become of his hat. He had his coat off too and was wiping it with his handkerchief and watching the house with one eye around the edge of the door. When I came in he straightened up and I thought at first he was looking at me. Then I don't know what he was looking at. "That beautiful girl," he said. "Fetch me a comb."

"They're waiting for you in the house," I said. "Granny wants to know what's the matter." Cousin Melisandre was all right now. It took Louvinia and Philadelphia both and finally Granny to get her into the house but Louvinia brought the elder-flower wine before Granny had time to send her after it and now Cousin Melisandre and Granny were waiting in the parlor.

"Your sister," Cousin Philip said. "And a hand-mirror."

"No, Sir," I said. "She's just our cousin. From Memphis. Granny says—" Because he didn't know Granny. It was pretty good for her to wait any time for anybody. But he didn't even let me finish.

"That beautiful, tender girl," he said. "And send a nigger with a basin of water and a towel." I went back toward the house. This time when I looked back I couldn't see his eye around the door-edge. "And a clothes brush," he said.

Granny wasn't waiting very much. She was at the front door. "Now what?" she said. I told her. "Does the man think we are giving a ball here in the middle of the day? Tell him I said to come on in and wash on the back gallery like we do. Louvinia's putting dinner on, and we're already late." But Granny didn't know Cousin Philip either. I told her again. She looked at me. "What did he say?" she said.

"He didn't say anything," I said. "Just that beautiful girl."

"That's all he said to me too," Ringo said. I hadn't heard

him come in. "'Sides the soap and water. Just that beautiful girl."

"Was he looking at you either when he said it?" I said.

"No," Ringo said. "I just thought for a minute he was."

Now Granny looked at Ringo and me both. "Hah," she said, and afterward when I was older I found out that Granny already knew Cousin Philip too, that she could look at one of them and know all the other Cousin Melisandres and Cousin Philips both without having to see them. "I sometimes think that bullets are just about the least fatal things that fly, especially in war.—All right," she said. "Take him his soap and water. But hurry."

We did. This time he didn't say "that beautiful girl." He said it twice. He took off his coat and handed it to Ringo. "Brush it good," he said. "Your sister, I heard you say."

"No, you didn't," I said.

"No matter," he said. "I want a nosegay. To carry in my hand."

"Those flowers are Granny's," I said.

"No matter," he said. He rolled up his sleeves and began to wash. "A small one. About a dozen blooms. Get something pink."

I went and got the flowers. I don't know whether Granny was still at the front door or not. Maybe she wasn't. At least she never said anything. So I picked the ones Ab Snopce's new Yankee horse had already trampled down and wiped the dirt off of them and straightened them out and went back to the summer house where Ringo was holding the hand-glass while Cousin Philip combed his hair. Then he put on his coat and buckled on his sabre again and held his feet out one at a time for Ringo to wipe his boots off with the towel, and Ringo saw it. I wouldn't have spoken at all because we were already later for dinner than ever now, even if there hadn't

never been a Yankee on the place. "You tore your britches on them Yankees," Ringo said.

So I went back to the house. Granny was standing in the hall. This time she just said, "Yes?" It was almost quiet.

"He tore his britches," I said. And she knew more about Cousin Philip than even Ringo could find out by looking at him. She had the needle already threaded in the bosom of her dress. And I went back to the summer house and then we came back to the house and up to the front door and I waited for him to go into the hall but he didn't, he just stood there holding the nosegay in one hand and his hat in the other, not very old, looking at that moment anyway not very much older than Ringo and me for all his braid and sash and sabre and boots and spurs, and even after just two years looking like all our soldiers and most of the other people too did: as if it had been so long now since he had had all he wanted to eat at one time that even his memory and palate had forgotten it and only his body remembered, standing there with his nosegay and that beautiful-girl look in his face like he couldn't have seen anything even if he had been looking at it.

"No," he said. "Announce me. It should be your nigger. But no matter." He said his full name, all three of them, twice, as if he thought I might forget them before I could reach the parlor.

"Go on in," I said. "They're waiting for you. They had already been waiting for you even before you found your pants were torn."

"Announce me," he said. He said his name again. "Of Tennessee. Lieutenant, Savage's Battalion, Forrest's Command, Provisional Army, Department of the West."

So I did. We crossed the hall to the parlor, where Granny stood between Cousin Melisandre's chair and the table where the decanter of elder-flower wine and three fresh glasses and even a plate of the tea cakes Louvinia had learned to make

from cornmeal and molasses were sitting, and he stopped again at that door too and I know he couldn't even see Cousin Melisandre for a minute, even though he never had looked at anything else but her. "Lieutenant Philip St-Just Backhouse," I said. I said it loud, because he had repeated it to me three times so I would be sure to get it right and I wanted to say it to suit him too since even if he had made us a good hour late for dinner, at least he had saved the silver. "Of Tennessee," I said. "Savage's Battalion, Forrest's Command, Provisional Army, Department of the West."

While you could count maybe five, there wasn't anything at all. Then Cousin Melisandre screamed. She sat bolt upright on the chair like she had sat beside the trunk in the litter of planks and shingles in the back yard this morning, with her eyes shut and her mouth open again, screaming.

III

So we were still another half an hour late for dinner. Though this time it never needed anybody but Cousin Philip to get Cousin Melisandre upstairs. All he needed to do was to try to speak to her again. Then Granny came back down and said, "Well, if we don't want to just quit and start calling it supper, we'd better walk in and eat it within the next hour and a half at least." So we walked in. Ab Snopes was already waiting in the dining-room. I reckon he had been waiting longer than anybody, because after all Cousin Melisandre wasn't any kin to him. Ringo drew Granny's chair and we sat down. Some of it was cold. The rest of it had been on the stove so long now that when you ate it it didn't matter whether it was cold or not. But Cousin Philip didn't seem to mind. And maybe it didn't take his memory very long to remember again what it was like to have all he wanted to eat, but I don't think his palate ever tasted any of it. He would

sit there eating like he hadn't seen any food of any kind in at least a week, and like he was expecting what was ever already on his fork to vanish before he could get it into his mouth. Then he would stop with the fork halfway to his mouth and sit there looking at Cousin Melisandre's empty place, laughing. That is, I don't know what else to call it but laughing. Until at last I said,

"Why don't you change your name?"

Then Granny quit eating too. She looked at me over her spectacles. Then she took both hands and lifted the spectacles up her nose until she could look at me through them. Then she even pushed the spectacles up into her front hair and looked at me. "That's the first sensible thing I've heard said on this place since eleven o'clock this morning," she said. "It's so sensible and simple that I reckon only a child could have thought of it." She looked at him. "Why don't you?"

He laughed some more. That is, his face did the same way and he made the same sound again. "My grandfather was at King's Mountain, with Marion all through Carolina. My uncle was defeated for Governor of Tennessee by a corrupt and traitorous cabal of tavern-keepers and Republican Abolitionists, and my father died at Chapultepec. After that, the name they bore is not mine to change. Even my life is not mine so long as my country lies bleeding and ravished beneath an invader's iron heel." Then he stopped laughing, or whatever it was. Then his face looked surprised. Then it quit looking surprised, the surprise fading out of it steady at first and gradually faster but not very much faster like the heat fades out of a piece of iron on a blacksmith's anvil until his face just looked amazed and quiet and almost peaceful. "Unless I lose it in battle," he said.

"You can't very well do that sitting here," Granny said.

"No," he said. But I don't think he even heard her except with his ears. He stood up. Even Ab Snopes was watching

him now, his knife stopped halfway to his mouth with a wad of greens on the end of the blade. "Yes," Cousin Philip said. His face even had the beautiful-girl look on it again. "Yes," he said. He thanked Granny for his dinner. That is, I reckon that's what he had told his mouth to say. It didn't make much sense to us, but I don't think he was paying any attention to it at all. He bowed. He wasn't looking at Granny nor at anything else. He said "Yes" again. Then he went out. Ringo and I followed to the front door and watched him mount his horse and sit there for a minute, bareheaded, looking up at the upstairs windows. It was Granny's room he was looking at, with mine and Ringo's room next to it. But Cousin Melisandre couldn't have seen him even if she had been in either one of them, since she was in bed on the other side of the house with Philadelphia probably still wringing the cloths out in cold water to lay on her head. He sat the horse well. He rode it well too: light and easy and back in the saddle and toes in and perpendicular from ankle to knee as Father had taught me. It was a good horse too.

"It's a damn good horse," I said.

"Git the soap," Ringo said.

But even then I looked quick back down the hall, even if I could hear Granny talking to Ab Snopes in the dining-room. "She's still in there," I said.

"Hah," Ringo said. "I done tasted soap in my mouth for a cuss I thought was a heap further off than that."

Then Cousin Philip spurred the horse and was gone. Or so Ringo and I thought. Two hours ago none of us had ever even heard of him; Cousin Melisandre had seen him twice and sat with her eyes shut screaming both times. But after we were older, Ringo and I realized that Cousin Philip was probably the only one in the whole lot of us that really believed even for one moment that he had said goodbye forever, that not only Granny and Louvinia knew better but Cousin Meli-

sandre did too, no matter what his last name had the bad luck to be.

We went back to the dining-room. Then I realized that Ab Snopes had been waiting for us to come back. Then we both knew he was going to ask Granny something because nobody wanted to be alone when they had to ask Granny something even when they didn't know they were going to have trouble with it. We had known Ab for over a year now. I should have known what it was like Granny already did. He stood up. "Well, Miz Millard," he said. "I figger you'll be safe all right from now on, with Bed Forrest and his boys right there in Jefferson. But until things quiet down a mite more, I'll just leave the horses in your lot for a day or two."

"What horses?" Granny said. She and Ab didn't just look at one another. They watched one another.

"Them fresh-captured horses from this morning," Ab said.

"What horses?" Granny said. Then Ab said it.

"My horses." Ab watched her.

"Why?" Granny said. But Ab knew what she meant.

"I'm the only grown man here," he said. Then he said, "I seen them first. They were chasing me before——" Then he said, talking fast now; his eyes had gone kind of glazed for a second but now they were bright again, looking in the stubbly dirt-colored fuzz on his face like two chips of broken plate in a worn-out door-mat: "Spoils of war! I brought them here! I tolled them in here: a military and-bush! And as the only and ranking Confedrit military soldier present ——"

"You ain't a soldier," Granny said. "You stipulated that to Colonel Sartoris yourself while I was listening. You told him yourself you would be his independent horse-captain but nothing more."

"Ain't that just exactly what I am trying to be?" he said. "Didn't I bring all six of them horses in here in my own possession, the same as if I was leading them on a rope?"

"Hah," Granny said. "A spoil of war or any other kind of spoil don't belong to a man or a woman either until they can take it home and put it down and turn their back on it. You never had time to get home with even the one you were riding. You ran in the first open gate you came to, no matter whose gate it was."

"Except it was the wrong one," he said. His eyes quit looking like china. They didn't look like anything. But I reckon his face would still look like an old door-mat even after he had turned all the way white. "So I reckon I got to even walk back to town," he said. "The woman that would . . ." His voice stopped. He and Granny looked at one another.

"Don't you say it," Granny said.

"Nome," he said. He didn't say it. ". . . a man of seven horses ain't likely to lend him a mule."

"No," Granny said. "But you won't have to walk."

We all went out to the lot. I don't reckon that even Ab knew until then that Granny had already found where he thought he had hidden the first horse and had it brought up to the lot with the other six. But at least he already had his saddle and bridle with him. But it was too late. Six of the horses moved about loose in the lot. The seventh one was tied just inside the gate with a piece of plow-line. It wasn't the horse Ab had come on because that horse had a blaze. Ab had known Granny long enough too. He should have known. Maybe he did. But at least he tried. He opened the gate.

"Well," he said, "it ain't getting no earlier. I reckon I better ——"

"Wait," Granny said. Then we looked at the horse which was tied to the fence. At first glance it looked the best one of the seven. You had to see it just right to tell its near leg was sprung a little, maybe from being worked too hard too young under too much weight. "Take that one," Granny said.

"That ain't mine," Ab said. "That's one of yourn. I'll just ——"

"Take that one," Granny said. Ab looked at her. You could have counted at least ten.

"Hell fire, Miz Millard," he said.

"I've told you before about cursing on this place," Granny said.

"Yessum," Ab said. Then he said it again: "Hell fire." He went into the lot and rammed the bit into the tied horse's mouth and clapped the saddle on and snatched the piece of plow-line off and threw it over the fence and got up and Granny stood there until he had ridden out of the lot and Ringo closed the gate and that was the first time I noticed the chain and padlock from the smokehouse door and Ringo locked it and handed Granny the key and Ab sat for a minute, looking down at her. "Well, good-day," he said. "I just hope for the sake of the Confederacy that Bed Forrest don't never tangle with you with all the horses he's got." Then he said it again, maybe worse this time because now he was already on a horse pointed toward the gate: "Or you'll damn shore leave him just one more passel of infantry before he can spit twice."

Then he was gone too. Except for hearing Cousin Melisandre now and then, and those six horses with U.S. branded on their hips standing in the lot, it might never have happened. At least Ringo and I thought that was all of it. Every now and then Philadelphia would come downstairs with the pitcher and draw some more cold water for Cousin Melisandre's cloths but we thought that after a while even that would just wear out and quit. Then Philadelphia came down again and came in to where Granny was cutting down a pair of Yankce pants that Father had worn home last time so they would fit Ringo. She didn't say anything. She just stood in the door until Granny said. "All right. What now?"

"She want the banjo," Philadelphia said.

"What?" Granny said. "My dulcimer? She can't play it. Go back upstairs."

But Philadelphia didn't move. "Could I ax Mammy to come help me?"

"No," Granny said. "Louvinia's resting. She's had about as much of this as I want her to stand. Go back upstairs. Give her some more wine if you can't think of anything else." And she told Ringo and me to go somewhere else, anywhere else, but even in the yard you could still hear Cousin Melisandre talking to Philadelphia. And once we even heard Granny though it was still mostly Cousin Melisandre telling Granny that she had already forgiven her, that nothing whatever had happened and that all she wanted now was peace. And after a while Louvinia came up from the cabin without even being sent for and went upstairs and then it began to look like we were going to be late for supper too. But Philadelphia finally came down and cooked it and carried Cousin Melisandre's tray up and then we quit eating; we could hear Louvinia overhead, in Granny's room now, and she came down and set the untasted tray on the table and stood beside Granny's chair with the key to the trunk in her hand.

"All right," Granny said. "Go call Joby and Lucius." We got the lantern and the shovels. We went to the orchard and removed the brush and dug up the trunk and got the dulcimer and buried the trunk and put the brush back and brought the key in to Granny. And Ringo and I could hear her from our room and Granny was right. We heard her for a long time and Granny was surely right; she just never said but half of it. The moon came up after a while and we could look down from our window into the garden, at Cousin Melisandre sitting on the bench with the moonlight glinting on the pearl inlay of the dulcimer, and Philadelphia squatting on the

sill of the gate with her apron over her head. Maybe she was asleep. It was already late. But I don't see how.

So we didn't hear Granny until she was already in the room, her shawl over her nightgown and carrying a candle. "In a minute I'm going to have about all of this I aim to stand too," she said. "Go wake Lucius and tell him to saddle the mule," she told Ringo. "Bring me the pen and ink and a sheet of paper." I fetched them. She didn't sit down. She stood at the bureau while I held the candle, writing even and steady and not very much, and signed her name and let the paper lie open to dry until Lucius came in. "Ab Snopes said that Mr. Forrest is in Jefferson," she told Lucius. "Find him. Tell him I will expect him here for breakfast in the morning and to bring that boy." She used to know General Forrest in Memphis before he got to be a general. He used to trade with Grandfather Millard's supply house and sometimes he would come out to sit with Grandfather on the front gallery and sometimes he would eat with them. "You can tell him I have six captured horses for him," she said. "And never mind patter-rollers or soldiers either. Haven't you got my signature on that paper?"

"I ain't worrying about them," Lucius said. "But suppose them Yankees ——"

"I see," Granny said. "Hah. I forgot. You've been waiting for Yankees, haven't you? But those this morning seemed to be too busy trying to stay free to have much time to talk about it, didn't they?—Get along," she said. "Do you think any Yankee is going to dare ignore what a Southern soldier or even a patter-roller wouldn't?—And you go to bed," she said.

We lay down, both of us on Ringo's pallet. We heard the mule when Lucius left. Then we heard the mule and at first we didn't know we had been asleep, the mule coming back now and the moon had started down the west and Cousin

Melisandre and Philadelphia were gone from the garden, to where Philadelphia at least could sleep better than sitting on a square sill with an apron over her head, or at least where it was quieter. And we heard Lucius fumbling up the stairs but we never heard Granny at all because she was already at the top of the stairs, talking down at the noise Lucius was trying not to make. "Speak up," she said. "I ain't asleep but I ain't a lip-reader either. Not in the dark."

"Genl Fawhrest say he respectful compliments," Lucius said, "and he can't come to breakfast this morning because he gonter to be whuppin Genl Smith at Tallahatchie Crossin about that time. But providin he ain't too fur away in the wrong direction when him and Genl Smith git done, he be proud to accept your invitation next time he in the neighborhood. And he say 'whut boy'."

While you could count about five, Granny didn't say anything. Then she said, "What?"

"He say 'whut boy'," Lucius said.

Then you could have counted ten. All we could hear was Lucius breathing. Then Granny said: "Did you wipe the mule down?"

"Yessum," Lucius said.

"Did you turn her back into the pasture?"

"Yessum," Lucius said.

"Then go to bed," Granny said. "And you too," she said.

General Forrest found out what boy. This time we didn't know we had been asleep either, and it was no one mule now. The sun was just rising. When we heard Granny and scrambled to the window, yesterday wasn't a patch on it. There were at least fifty of them now, in gray; the whole outdoors was full of men on horses, with Cousin Philip out in front of them, sitting his horse in almost exactly the same spot where he had been yesterday, looking up at Granny's window and not seeing it or anything else this time either. He had a hat

now. He was holding it clamped over his heart and he hadn't shaved and yesterday he had looked younger than Ringo because Ringo always had looked about ten years older than me. But now, with the first sun-ray making a little soft fuzz in the gold-colored stubble on his face, he looked even younger than I did, and gaunt and worn in the face like he hadn't slept any last night and something else in his face too: like he not only hadn't slept last night but by godfrey he wasn't going to sleep tonight either as long as he had anything to do with it. "Goodbye," he said. "Goodbye," and whirled his horse, spurring, and raised the new hat over his head like he had carried the sabre yesterday and the whole mass of them went piling back across flower beds and lawns and all and back down the drive toward the gate while Granny still stood at her window in her nightgown, her voice louder than any man's anywhere, I don't care who he is or what he would be doing: "Backhouse! Backhouse! You, Backhouse!"

So we ate breakfast early. Granny sent Ringo in his night-shirt to wake Louvinia and Lucius both. So Lucius had the mule saddled before Louvinia even got the fire lit. This time Granny didn't write a note. "Go to Tallahatchie Crossing," she told Lucius. "Sit there and wait for him if necessary."

"Suppose they done already started the battle?" Lucius said.

"Suppose they have?" Granny said. "What business is that of yours or mine either? You find Bedford Forrest. Tell him this is important; it won't take long. But don't you show your face here again without him."

Lucius rode away. He was gone four days. He didn't even get back in time for the wedding, coming back up the drive about sundown on the fourth day with two soldiers in one of General Forrest's forage wagons with the mule tied to the tailgate. He didn't know where he had been and he never

did catch up with the battle. "I never even heard it," he told Joby and Lucius and Louvinia and Philadelphia and Ringo and me. "If wars always moves that far and that fast, I don't see how they ever have time to fight."

But it was all over then. It was the second day, the day after Lucius left. It was just after dinner this time and by now we were used to soldiers. But these were different, just five of them, and we never had seen just that few of them before and we had come to think of soldiers as either jumping on and off horses in the yard or going back and forth through Granny's flower beds at full gallop. These were all officers and I reckon maybe I hadn't seen so many soldiers after all because I never saw this much braid before. They came up the drive at a trot, like people just taking a ride, and stopped without trompling even one flower bed and General Forrest got down and came up the walk toward where Granny waited on the front gallery—a big, dusty man with a big beard so black it looked almost blue and eyes like a sleepy owl, already taking off his hat. "Well, Miss Rosie," he said.

"Don't call me Rosie," Granny said. "Come in. Ask your gentlemen to alight and come in."

"They'll wait there," General Forrest said. "We are a little rushed. My plans have. . . ." Then we were in the library. He wouldn't sit down. He looked tired all right, but there was something else a good deal livelier than just tired. "Well, Miss Rosie," he said. "I ——"

"Don't call me Rosie," Granny said. "Can't you even say Rosa?"

"Yessum," he said. But he couldn't. At least, he never did. "I reckon we both have had about enough of this. That boy ——"

"Hah," Granny said. "Night before last you were saying what boy. Where is he? I sent you word to bring him with you."

"Under arrest," General Forrest said. It was a considerable more than just tired. "I spent four days getting Smith just where I wanted him. After that, this boy here could have fought the battle." He said 'fit' for fought just as he said 'druv' for drove and 'drug' for dragged. But maybe when you fought battles like he did, even Granny didn't mind how you talked. "I won't bother you with details. He didn't know them either. All he had to do was exactly what I told him. I did everything but draw a diagram on his coat-tail of exactly what he was to do, no more and no less, from the time he left me until he saw me again: which was to make contact and then fall back. I gave him just exactly the right number of men so that he couldn't do anything else but that. I told him exactly how fast to fall back and how much racket to make doing it and even how to make the racket. But what do you think he did?"

"I can tell you," Granny said. "He sat on his horse at five o'clock yesterday morning, with my whole yard full of men behind him, yelling goodbye at my window."

"He divided his men and sent half of them into the bushes to make a noise and took the other half who were the nearest to complete fools and led a sabre charge on that outpost. He didn't fire a shot. He drove it clean back with sabres onto Smith's main body and scared Smith so that he threw out all his cavalry and pulled out behind it and now I don't know whether I'm about to catch him or he's about to catch me. My provost finally caught the boy last night. He had come back and got the other thirty men of his company and was twenty miles ahead again, trying to find something to lead another charge against. 'Do you want to be killed?' I said. 'Not especially,' he said. 'That is, I don't especially care one way or the other.' 'Then neither do I,' I said. 'But you risked a whole company of my men.' 'Ain't that what they enlisted for?' he said. 'They enlisted into a military establishment the

purpose of which is to expend each man only at a profit. Or maybe you don't consider me a shrewd enough trader in human meat?' 'I can't say,' he said. 'Since day before yesterday I ain't thought very much about how you or anybody else runs this war.' 'And just what were you doing day before yesterday that changed your ideas and habits?' I said. 'Fighting some of it,' he said. 'Dispersing the enemy.' 'Where?' I said. 'At a lady's house a few miles from Jefferson,' he said. 'One of the niggers called her Granny like the white boy did. The others called her Miss Rosie.' " This time Granny didn't say anything. She just waited.

"Go on," she said.

" 'I'm still trying to win battles, even if since day before yesterday you ain't,' I said. 'I'll send you down to Johnston at Jackson,' I said. 'He'll put you inside Vicksburg, where you can lead private charges day and night too if you want.' 'Like hell you will,' he said. And I said—excuse me—'Like hell I won't.' " And Granny didn't say anything. It was like day before yesterday with Ab Snopes: not like she hadn't heard but as if right now it didn't matter, that this was no time either to bother with such.

"And did you?" she said.

"I can't. He knows it. You can't punish a man for routing an enemy four times his weight. What would I say back there in Tennessee, where we both live, let alone that uncle of his, the one they licked for Governor six years ago, on Bragg's personal staff now, with his face over Bragg's shoulder every time Bragg opens a dispatch or picks up a pen. And I'm still trying to win battles. But I can't. Because of a girl, one single lone young female girl that ain't got anything under the sun against him except that, since it was his misfortune to save her from a passel of raiding enemy in a situation that everybody but her is trying to forget, she can't seem to bear to hear his last name. Yet because of that, every battle

I plan from now on will be at the mercy of a twenty-two-year-old shavetail—excuse me again—who might decide to lead a private charge any time he can holler at least two men in gray coats into moving in the same direction.” He stopped. He looked at Granny. “Well?” he said.

“So now you’ve got to it,” Granny said. “Well what, Mr. Forrest?”

“Why, just have done with this foolishness. I told you I’ve got that boy, in close arrest, with a guard with a bayonet. But there won’t be any trouble there. I figured even yesterday morning that he had already lost his mind. But I reckon he’s recovered enough of it since the Provost took him last night to comprehend that I still consider myself his commander even if he don’t. So all necessary now is for you to put your foot down. Put it down hard. Now. You’re her grandma. She lives in your home. And it looks like she is going to live in it a good while yet before she gets back to Memphis to that uncle or whoever it is that calls himself her guardian. So just put your foot down. Make her. Mr. Millard would have already done that if he had been here. And I know when. It would have been two days ago by now.”

Granny waited until he got done. She stood with her arms crossed, holding each elbow in the other. “Is that all I’m to do?” she said.

“Yes,” General Forrest said. “If she don’t want to listen to you right at first, maybe as his commander ——”

Granny didn’t even say “Hah.” She didn’t even send me. She didn’t even stop in the hall and call. She went upstairs herself and we stood there and I thought maybe she was going to bring the dulcimer too and I thought how if I was General Forrest I would go back and get Cousin Philip and make him sit in the library until about supper-time while Cousin Melisandre played the dulcimer and sang. Then he

could take Cousin Philip on back and then he could finish the war without worrying.

She didn't have the dulcimer. She just had Cousin Melisandre. They came in and Granny stood to one side again with her arms crossed, holding her elbows. "Here she is," she said. "Say it—This is Mr. Bedford Forrest," she told Cousin Melisandre. "Say it," she told General Forrest.

He didn't have time. When Cousin Melisandre first came, she tried to read aloud to Ringo and me. It wasn't much. That is, what she insisted on reading to us wasn't so bad, even if it was mostly about ladies looking out windows and playing on something (maybe they were dulcimers too) while somebody else was off somewhere fighting. It was the way she read it. When Granny said this is Mister Forrest, Cousin Melisandre's face looked exactly like her voice would sound when she read to us. She took two steps into the library and curtsied, spreading her hoops back, and stood up. "General Forrest," she said. "I am acquainted with an associate of his. Will the General please give him the sincerest wishes for triumph in war and success in love, from one who will never see him again?" Then she curtsied again and spread her hoops backward and stood up and took two steps backward and turned and went out.

After a while Granny said, "Well, Mr. Forrest?"

General Forrest began to cough. He lifted his coattail with one hand and reached the other into his hip pocket like he was going to pull at least a musket out of it and got his handkerchief and coughed into it a while. It wasn't very clean. It looked about like the one Cousin Philip was trying to wipe his coat off with in the summer house day before yesterday. Then he put the handkerchief back. He didn't say "Hah" either. "Can I reach the Holly Branch road without having to go through Jefferson?" he said.

Then Granny moved. "Open the desk," she said. "Lay out

a sheet of note-paper." I did. And I remember how I stood at one side of the desk and General Forrest at the other, and watched Granny's hand move the pen steady and not very slow and not very long across the paper because it never did take her very long to say anything, no matter what it was, whether she was talking it or writing it. Though I didn't see it then, but only later, when it hung framed under glass above Cousin Melisandre's and Cousin Philip's mantel: the fine steady slant of Granny's hand and General Forrest's sprawling signatures below it that looked itself a good deal like a charge of massed cavalry:

Lieutenant P. S. Backhouse, Company D, Tennessee Cavalry, was this day raised to the honorary rank of Brevet Major General & killed while engaging the enemy. Vice whom Philip St-Just Backus is hereby appointed Lieutenant, Company D, Tennessee Cavalry.

N. B. Forrest Genl

I didn't see it then. General Forrest picked it up. "Now I've got to have a battle," he said. "Another sheet, son." I laid that one out on the desk.

"A battle?" Granny said.

"To give Johnston," he said. "Confound it, Miss Rosie, can't you understand either that I'm just a fallible mortal man trying to run a military command according to certain fixed and inviolable rules, no matter how foolish the business looks to superior outside folks?"

"All right," Granny said. "You had one. I was looking at it."

"So I did," General Forrest said. "Hah," he said. "The battle of Sartoris."

"No," Granny said. "Not at my house."

"They did all the shooting down at the creek," I said.

"What creek?" he said.

So I told him. It ran through the pasture. Its name was Hurricane Creek but not even the white people called it hurricane except Granny. General Forrest didn't either when he sat down at the desk and wrote the report to General Johnston at Jackson:

A unit of my command on detached duty engaged a body of the enemy & drove him from the field & dispersed him this day 28th ult. April 1862 at Harrykin Creek. With loss of one man.

N. B. Forrest Genl

I saw that. I watched him write it. Then he got up and folded the sheets into his pocket and was already going toward the table where his hat was.

"Wait," Granny said. "Lay out another sheet," she said. "Come back here."

General Forrest stopped and turned. "Another one?"

"Yes!" Granny said. "A furlough, pass—whatever you busy military establishments call them! So John Sartoris can come home long enough to ——" and she said it herself, she looked straight at me and even backed up and said some of it over as though to make sure there wouldn't be any mistake: "—— can come back home and give away that damn bride!"

IV

AND THAT was all. The day came and Granny waked Ringo and me before sunup and we ate what breakfast we had from two plates on the back steps. And we dug up the trunk and brought it into the house and polished the silver and Ringo and I brought dogwood and redbud branches from the pasture and Granny cut the flowers, all of them, cutting them herself with Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia just carrying the baskets; so many of them until the house was so full that

Ringo and I would believe we smelled them even across the pasture each time we came up. Though of course we could, it was just the food—the last ham from the smokehouse and the chickens and the flour which Granny had been saving and the last of the sugar which she had been saving along with the bottle of champagne for the day when the North surrendered—which Louvinia had been cooking for two days now, to remind us each time we approached the house of what was going on and that the flowers were there. As if we could have forgotten about the food. And they dressed Cousin Melisandre and, Ringo in his new blue pants and I in my gray ones which were not so new, we stood in the late afternoon on the gallery—Granny and Cousin Melisandre and Louvinia and Philadelphia and Ringo and I—and watched them enter the gate. General Forrest was not one. Ringo and I had thought maybe he might be, if only to bring Cousin Philip. Then we thought that maybe, since Father was coming anyway, General Forrest would let Father bring him, with Cousin Philip maybe handcuffed to Father and the soldier with the bayonet following, or maybe still just handcuffed to the soldier until he and Cousin Melisandre were married and Father unlocked him.

But General Forrest wasn't one, and Cousin Philip wasn't handcuffed to anybody and there was no bayonet and not even a soldier because these were all officers too. And we stood in the parlor while the home-made candles burnt in the last of sunset in the bright candlesticks which Philadelphia and Ringo and I had polished with the rest of the silver because Granny and Louvinia were both busy cooking and even Cousin Melisandre polished a little of it although Louvinia could pick out the ones she polished without hardly looking and hand them to Philadelphia to polish again:—Cousin Melisandre in the dress which hadn't needed to be altered for her at all because Mother wasn't much older than

Cousin Melisandre even when she died, and which would still button on Granny too just like it did the day she married in it, and the chaplain and Father and Cousin Philip and the four others in their gray and braid and sabres and Cousin Melisandre's face was all right now and Cousin Philip's was too because it just had the beautiful-girl look on it and none of us had ever seen him look any other way. Then we ate, and Ringo and I anyway had been waiting on that for three days and then we did it and then it was over too, fading just a little each day until the palate no longer remembered and only our mouths would run a little water as we would name the dishes aloud to one another, until even the water would run less and less and less and it would take something we just hoped to eat some day if they ever got done fighting, to make it run at all.

And that was all. The last sound of wheel and hoof died away, Philadelphia came in from the parlor carrying the candlesticks and blowing out the candles as she came, and Louvinia set the kitchen clock on the table and gathered the last of soiled silver from supper into the dishpan and it might never have even been. "Well," Granny said. She didn't move, leaning her forearms on the table a little and we had never seen that before. She spoke to Ringo without turning her head: "Go call Joby and Lucius." And even when we brought the trunk in and set it against the wall and opened back the lid, she didn't move. She didn't even look at Louvinia either. "Put the clock in too," she said. "I don't think we'll bother to time ourselves tonight."

Golden Land

I

IF HE had been thirty, he would not have needed the two aspirin tablets and the half glass of raw gin before he could bear the shower's needling on his body and steady his hands to shave. But then when he had been thirty neither could he have afforded to drink as much each evening as he now drank; certainly he would not have done it in the company of the men and the women in which, at forty-eight, he did each evening, even though knowing during the very final hours filled with the breaking of glass and the shrill cries of drunken women above the drums and saxophones—the hours during which he carried a little better than his weight both in the amount of liquor consumed and in the number and sum of checks paid—that six or eight hours later he would rouse from what had not been sleep at all but instead that dreamless stupefaction of alcohol out of which last night's turgid and licensed uproar would die, as though without any interval for rest or recuperation, into the familiar shape of his bedroom—the bed's foot silhouetted by the morning light which entered the bougainvillaea-bound windows beyond which his painful and almost unbearable eyes could see the view which might be called the monument to almost twenty-five years of industry and desire, of shrewdness and luck and even fortitude—the opposite canyonflank dotted with the white villas halfhidden in imported

olive groves or friezed by the sombre spaced columns of cypress like the façades of eastern temples, whose owners' names and faces and even voices were glib and familiar in back corners of the United States and of America and of the world where those of Einstein and Rousseau and Esculapius had never sounded.

He didn't waken sick. He never wakened ill nor became ill from drinking, not only because he had drunk too long and too steadily for that, but because he was too tough even after the thirty soft years; he came from too tough stock on that day thirty-four years ago when at fourteen he had fled, on the brakebeam of a westbound freight, the little lost Nebraska town named for, permeated with, his father's history and existence—a town to be sure, but only in the sense that any shadow is larger than the object which casts it. It was still frontier even as he remembered it at five and six—the projected and increased shadow of a small outpost of sodroofed dugouts on the immense desolation of the plains where his father, Ira Ewing too, had been first to essay to wring wheat during the six days between those when, outdoors in spring and summer and in the fetid halfdark of a snowbound dugout in the winter and fall, he preached. The second Ira Ewing had come a long way since then, from that barren and treeless village which he had fled by a night freight to where he now lay in a hundred-thousand-dollar house, waiting until he knew that he could rise and go to the bath and put the two aspirin tablets into his mouth. They—his mother and father—had tried to explain it to him—something about fortitude, the will to endure. At fourteen he could neither answer them with logic and reason nor explain what he wanted: he could only flee. Nor was he fleeing his father's harshness and wrath. He was fleeing the scene itself—the treeless immensity in the lost center of which he seemed to see the sum of his father's and mother's

dead youth and bartered lives as a tiny forlorn spot which nature permitted to green into brief and niggard wheat for a season's moment before blotting it all with the primal and invincible snow as though (not even promise, not even threat) in grim and almost playful augury of the final doom of all life. And it was not even this that he was fleeing because he was not fleeing: it was only that absence, removal, was the only argument which fourteen knew how to employ against adults with any hope of success. He spent the next ten years half tramp half casual laborer as he drifted down the Pacific Coast to Los Angeles; at thirty he was married, to a Los Angeles girl, daughter of a carpenter, and father of a son and a daughter and with a foothold in real estate; at forty-eight he spent fifty thousand dollars a year, owning a business which he had built up unaided and preserved intact through nineteen-twenty-nine; he had given to his children luxuries and advantages which his own father not only could not have conceived in fact but would have condemned completely in theory—as it proved, as the paper which the Filipino chauffeur, who each morning carried him into the house and undressed him and put him to bed, had removed from the pocket of his topcoat and laid on the reading table proved, with reason. On the death of his father twenty years ago he had returned to Nebraska, for the first time, and fetched his mother back with him, and she was now established in a home of her own only the less sumptuous because she refused (with a kind of abashed and thoughtful unshakability which he did not remark) anything finer or more elaborate. It was the house in which they had all lived at first, though he and his wife and children had moved within the year. Three years ago they had moved again, into the house where he now waked in a select residential section of Beverley Hills, but not once in the nineteen years had he failed to stop (not even during the last five, when to

move at all in the mornings required a terrific drain on that character or strength which the elder Ira had bequeathed him, which had enabled the other Ira to pause on the Nebraska plain and dig a hole for his wife to bear children in while he planted wheat) on his way to the office (twenty miles out of his way to the office) and spend ten minutes with her. She lived in as complete physical ease and peace as he could devise. He had arranged her affairs so that she did not even need to bother with money, cash, in order to live; he had arranged credit for her with a neighboring market and butcher so that the Japanese gardener who came each day to water and tend the flowers could do her shopping for her; she never even saw the bills. And the only reason she had no servant was that even at seventy she apparently clung stubbornly to the old habit of doing her own cooking and housework. So it would seem that he had been right. Perhaps there were times when, lying in bed like this and waiting for the will to rise and take the aspirin and the gin (mornings perhaps following evenings when he had drunk more than ordinarily and when even the six or seven hours of oblivion had not been sufficient to enable him to distinguish between reality and illusion) something of the old strong harsh Campbellite blood which the elder Ira must have bequeathed him might have caused him to see or feel or imagine his father looking down from somewhere upon him, the prodigal, and what he had accomplished. If this were so, then surely the elder Ira, looking down for the last two mornings upon the two tabloid papers which the Filipino removed from his master's topcoat and laid on the reading table, might have taken advantage of that old blood and taken his revenge, not just for that afternoon thirty-four years ago but for the entire thirty-four years.

When he gathered himself, his will, his body, at last and rose from the bed he struck the paper so that it fell to the

floor and lay open at his feet, but he did not look at it. He just stood so, tall, in silk pajamas, thin where his father had been gaunt with the years of hard work and unceasing struggle with the unpredictable and implacable earth (even now, despite the life which he had led, he had very little paunch) looking at nothing while at his feet the black headline flared above the row of five or six tabloid photographs from which his daughter alternately stared back or flaunted long pale shins: APRIL LALEAR BARES ORGY SECRETS. When he moved at last he stepped on the paper, walking on his bare feet into the bath; now it was his trembling and jerking hands that he watched as he shook the two tablets onto the glass shelf and set the tumbler into the rack and unstoppered the gin bottle and braced his knuckles against the wall in order to pour into the tumbler. But he did not look at the paper, not even when, shaved, he re-entered the bedroom and went to the bed beside which his slippers sat and shoved the paper aside with his foot in order to step into them. Perhaps, doubtless, he did not need to. The trial was but entering its third tabloidal day now, and so for two days his daughter's face had sprung out at him, hard, blonde and inscrutable, from every paper he opened; doubtless he had never forgot her while he slept even, that he had waked into thinking about remembering her as he had waked into the dying drunken uproar of the evening eight hours behind him without any interval between for rest or forgetting.

Nevertheless as, dressed, in a burnt orange turtleneck sweater beneath his gray flannels, he descended the Spanish staircase, he was outwardly calm and possessed. The delicate iron balustrade and the marble steps coiled down to the tile-floored and barnlike living room beyond which he could hear his wife and son talking on the breakfast terrace. The son's name was Voyd. He and his wife had named the two children by what might have been called mutual contemptu-

ous armistice—his wife called the boy Voyd, for what reason he never knew; he in his turn named the girl (the child whose woman's face had met him from every paper he touched for two days now beneath or above the name, April Lalear) Samantha, after his own mother. He could hear them talking—the wife between whom and himself there had been nothing save civility, and not always a great deal of that, for ten years now; and the son who one afternoon two years ago had been delivered at the door drunk and insensible by a car whose occupants he did not see and, it devolving upon him to undress the son and put him to bed, whom he discovered to be wearing, in place of underclothes, a woman's brassière and step-ins. A few minutes later, hearing the blows perhaps, Voyd's mother ran in and found her husband beating the still unconscious son with a series of towels which a servant was steeping in rotation in a basin of ice-water. He was beating the son hard, with grim and deliberate fury. Whether he was trying to sober the son up or was merely beating him, possibly he himself did not know. His wife though jumped to the latter conclusion. In his raging disillusionment he tried to tell her about the woman's garments but she refused to listen; she assailed him in turn with virago fury. Since that day the son had contrived to see his father only in his mother's presence (which neither the son nor the mother found very difficult, by the way) and at which times the son treated his father with a blend of cringing spite and vindictive insolence half a cat's and half a woman's.

He emerged onto the terrace; the voices ceased. The sun, strained by the vague high soft almost nebulous California haze, fell upon the terrace with a kind of treacherous unbrightness. The terrace, the sundrenched terra cotta tiles, butted into a rough and savage shear of canyonwall bare yet without dust, on or against which a solid mat of flowers

bloomed in fierce lush myriad-colored paradox as though in place of being rooted into and drawing from the soil they lived upon air alone and had been merely leaned intact against the sustenanceless lavawall by someone who would later return and take them away. The son, Voyd, apparently naked save for a pair of straw-colored shorts, his body brown with sun and scented faintly by the depilatory which he used on arms, chest and legs, lay in a wicker chair, his feet in straw beach shoes, an open newspaper across his brown legs. The paper was the highest class one of the city, yet there was a black headline across half of it too, and even without pausing, without even being aware that he had looked, Ira saw there too the name which he recognized. He went on to his place; the Filipino who put him to bed each night, in a white service jacket now, drew his chair. Beside the glass of orange juice and the waiting cup lay a neat pile of mail topped by a telegram. He sat down and took up the telegram; he had not glanced at his wife until she spoke:

"Mrs. Ewing telephoned. She says for you to stop in there on your way to town."

He stopped; his hands opening the telegram stopped. Still blinking a little against the sun he looked at the face opposite him across the table—the smooth dead makeup, the thin lips and the thin nostrils and the pale blue unforgiving eyes, the meticulous platinum hair which looked as though it had been transferred to her skull with a brush from a book of silver leaf such as window painters use. "What?" he said. "Telephoned? Here?"

"Why not? Have I ever objected to any of your women telephoning you here?"

The unopened telegram crumpled suddenly in his hand. "You know what I mean," he said harshly. "She never telephoned me in her life. She don't have to. Not that message.

When have I ever failed to go by there on my way to town?"

"How do I know?" she said. "Or are you the same model son you have been a husband and seem to be a father?" Her voice was not shrill yet, nor even very loud, and none could have told how fast her breathing was because she sat so still, rigid beneath the impeccable and unbelievable hair, looking at him with that pale and outraged unforgiveness. They both looked at each other across the luxurious table—the two people who at one time twenty years ago would have turned as immediately and naturally and unthinkingly to one another in trouble, who even ten years ago might have done so.

"You know what I mean," he said, harshly again, holding himself too against the trembling which he doubtless believed was from last night's drinking, from the spent alcohol. "She don't read papers. She never even sees one. Did you send it to her?"

"I?" she said. "Send what?"

"Damnation!" he cried. "A paper! Did you send it to her? Don't lie to me."

"What if I did?" she cried. "Who is she, that she must not know about it? Who is she, that you should shield her from knowing it? Did you make any effort to keep me from knowing it? Did you make any effort to keep it from happening? Why didn't you think about that all those years while you were too drunk, too besotted with drink, to know or notice or care what Samantha was—"

"Miss April Llear of the cinema, if you please," Voyd said. They paid no attention to him; they glared at one another across the table.

"Ah," he said, quiet and rigid, his lips scarcely moving. "So I am to blame for this too, am I? I made my daughter a bitch, did I? Maybe you will tell me next that I made my son a f—"

"Stop!" she cried. She was panting now; they glared at one another across the suave table, across the five feet of irrevocable division.

"Now, now," Voyd said. "Don't interfere with the girl's career. After all these years, when at last she seems to have found a part that she can—" He ceased; his father had turned and was looking at him. Voyd lay in his chair, looking at his father with that veiled insolence that was almost feminine. Suddenly it became completely feminine; with a muffled halfscream he swung his legs out to spring up and flee but it was too late; Ira stood above him, gripping him not by the throat but by the face with one hand, so that Voyd's mouth puckered and slobbered in his father's hard, shaking hand. Then the mother sprang forward and tried to break Ira's grip but he flung her away and then caught and held her, struggling too, with the other hand when she sprang in again.

"Go on," he said. "Say it." But Voyd could say nothing because of his father's hand gripping his jaws open, or more than likely because of terror. His body was free of the chair now, writhing and thrashing while he made his slobbering, moaning sound of terror while his father held him with one hand and held his screaming mother with the other one. Then Ira flung Voyd free, onto the terrace; Voyd rolled once and came onto his feet, crouching, retreating toward the French windows with one arm flung up before his face while he cursed his father. Then he was gone. Ira faced his wife, holding her quiet too at last, panting too, the skillful map of makeup standing into relief now like a paper mask trimmed smoothly and pasted onto her skull. He released her.

"You sot," she said. "You drunken sot. And yet you wonder why your children—"

"Yes," he said quietly. "All right. That's not the question. That's all done. The question is, what to do about it. My

father would have known. He did it once." He spoke in a dry light pleasant voice: so much so that she stood, panting still but quiet, watching him. "I remember. I was about ten. We had rats in the barn. We tried everything. Terriers. Poison. Then one day father said, 'Come.' We went to the barn and stopped all the cracks, the holes. Then we set fire to it. What do you think of that?" Then she was gone too. He stood for a moment, blinking a little, his eyeballs beating faintly and steadily in his skull with the impact of the soft unchanging sunlight, the fierce innocent mass of the flowers. "Philip!" he called. The Filipino appeared, brownfaced, impassive, with a pot of hot coffee, and set it beside the empty cup and the icebedded glass of orange juice. "Get me a drink," Ira said. The Filipino glanced at him, then he became busy at the table, shifting the cup and setting the pot down and shifting the cup again while Ira watched him. "Did you hear me?" Ira said. The Filipino stood erect and looked at him.

"You told me not to give it to you until you had your orange juice and coffee."

"Will you or won't you get me a drink?" Ira shouted.

"Very good, sir," the Filipino said. He went out. Ira looked after him; this had happened before: he knew well that the brandy would not appear until he had finished the orange juice and the coffee, though just where the Filipino lurked to watch him he never knew. He sat again and opened the crumpled telegram and read it, the glass of orange juice in the other hand. It was from his secretary: MADE SETUP BEFORE I BROKE STORY LAST NIGHT STOP THIRTY PERCENT FRONT PAGE STOP MADE APPOINTMENT FOR YOU COURTHOUSE THIS P.M. STOP WILL YOU COME TO OFFICE OR CALL ME. He read the telegram again, the glass of orange juice still poised. Then he put both down and rose and went and

lifted the paper from the terrace where Voyd had flung it, and read the half headline: LALEAR WOMAN DAUGHTER OF PROMINENT LOCAL FAMILY. Admits Real Name Is Samantha Ewing, Daughter of Ira Ewing, Local Realtor. He read it quietly; he said quietly, aloud:

"It was that Jap that showed her the paper. It was that damned gardener." He returned to the table. After a while the Filipino came, with the brandy-and-soda, and wearing now a jacket of bright imitation tweed, telling him that the car was ready.

II

HIS MOTHER lived in Glendale; it was the house which he had taken when he married and later bought, in which his son and daughter had been born—a bungalow in a cul-de-sac of pepper trees and flowering shrubs and vines which the Japanese tended, backed into a barren foothill combed and curried into a cypress-and-marble cemetery dramatic as a stage set and topped by an electric sign in red bulbs which, in the San Fernando valley fog, glared in broad sourceless ruby as though just beyond the crest lay not heaven but hell. The length of his sports model car in which the Filipino sat reading a paper dwarfed it. But she would have no other, just as she would have neither servant, car, nor telephone—a gaunt spare slightly stooped woman upon whom even California and ease had put no flesh, sitting in one of the chairs which she had insisted on bringing all the way from Nebraska. At first she had been content to allow the Nebraska furniture to remain in storage, since it had not been needed (when Ira moved his wife and family out of the house and into the second one, the intermediate one, they had bought new furniture too, leaving the first house furnished complete for his mother) but one day, he could not

recall just when, he discovered that she had taken the one chair out of storage and was using it in the house. Later, after he began to sense that quality of unrest in her, he had suggested that she let him clear the house of its present furniture and take all of hers out of storage but she declined, apparently preferring or desiring to leave the Nebraska furniture where it was. Sitting so, a knitted shawl about her shoulders, she looked less like she lived in or belonged to the house, the room, than the son with his beach burn and his faintly theatrical gray temples and his bright expensive suavely antiphonal garments did. She had changed hardly at all in the thirty-four years; she and the older Ira Ewing too, as the son remembered him, who, dead, had suffered as little of alteration as while he had been alive. As the sod Nebraska outpost had grown into a village and then into a town, his father's aura alone had increased, growing into the proportions of a giant who at some irrevocable yet recent time had engaged barchanded in some titanic struggle with the pitiless earth and endured and in a sense conquered—it too, like the town, a shadow out of all proportion to the gaunt gnarled figure of the actual man. And the actual woman too as the son remembered them back in that time. Two people who drank air and who required to eat and sleep as he did and who had brought him into the world, yet were strangers as though of another race, who stood side by side in an irrevocable loneliness as though strayed from another planet, not as husband and wife but as blood brother and sister, even twins, of the same travail because they had gained a strange peace through fortitude and the will and strength to endure.

"Tell me again what it is," she said. "I'll try to understand."

"So it was Kazimura that showed you the damned paper," he said. She didn't answer this; she was not looking at him.

"You tell me she has been in the pictures before, for two years. That that was why she had to change her name, that they all have to change their names."

"Yes. They call them extra parts. For about two years, God knows why."

"And then you tell me that this—that all this was so she could get into the pictures—"

He started to speak, then he caught himself back out of some quick impatience, some impatience perhaps of grief or despair or at least rage, holding his voice, his tone, quiet: "I said that that was one possible reason. All I know is that the man has something to do with pictures, giving out the parts. And that the police caught him and Samantha and the other girl in an apartment with the doors all locked and that Samantha and the other woman were naked. They say that he was naked too and he says he was not. He says in the trial that he was framed—tricked; that they were trying to blackmail him into giving them parts in a picture; that they fooled him into coming there and arranged for the police to break in just after they had taken off their clothes; that one of them made a signal from the window. Maybe so. Or maybe they were all just having a good time and were innocently caught." Unmoving, rigid, his face broke, wrung with faint bitter smiling as though with indomitable and impassive suffering, or maybe just smiling, just rage. Still his mother did not look at him.

"But you told me she was already in the pictures. That that was why she had to change her—"

"I said, extra parts," he said. He had to catch himself again, out of his jangled and outraged nerves, back from the fierce fury of the impatience. "Can't you understand that you don't get into the pictures just by changing your name? and that you don't even stay there when you get in? that you can't even stay there by being female? that they come

here in droves on every train—girls younger and prettier than Samantha' and who will do anything to get into the pictures? So will she, apparently; but who know or are willing to learn to do more things than even she seems to have thought of? But let's don't talk about it. She has made her bed; all I can do is to help her up: I can't wash the sheets. Nobody can. I must go, anyway; I'm late." He rose, looking down at her. "They said you telephoned me this morning. Is this what it was?"

"No," she said. Now she looked up at him; now her gnarled hands began to pick faintly at one another. "You offered me a servant once."

"Yes. I thought fifteen years ago that you ought to have one. Have you changed your mind? Do you want me to—"

Now she stopped looking at him again, though her hands did not cease. "That was fifteen years ago. It would have cost at least five hundred dollars a year. That would be—"

He laughed, short and harsh. "I'd like to see the Los Angeles servant you could get for five hundred dollars a year. But what—" He stopped laughing, looking down at her.

"That would be at least five thousand dollars," she said.

He looked down at her. After a while he said, "Are you asking me again for money?" She didn't answer nor move, her hands picking slowly and quietly at one another. "Ah," he said. "You want to go away. You want to run from it. So do I!" he cried, before he could catch himself this time; "so do I! But you did not choose me when you elected a child; neither did I choose my two. But I shall have to bear them and you will have to bear all of us. There is no help for it." He caught himself now, panting, quieting himself by will as when he would rise from bed, though his voice was still harsh: "Where would you go? Where would you hide from it?"

"Home," she said.

"Home?" he repeated; he repeated in a kind of amazement: "home?" before he understood. "You would go back there? with those winters, that snow and all? Why, you wouldn't live to see the first Christmas: don't you know that?" She didn't move nor look up at him. "Nonsense," he said. "This will blow over. In a month there will be two others and nobody except us will even remember it. And you don't need money. You have been asking me for money for years, but you don't need it. I had to worry about money so much at one time myself that I swore that the least I could do was to arrange your affairs so you would never even have to look at the stuff. I must go; there is something at the office today. I'll see you tomorrow."

It was already one o'clock. "Courthouse," he told the Filipino, settling back into the car. "My God, I want a drink." He rode with his eyes closed against the sun; the secretary had already sprung onto the runningboard before he realized that they had reached the courthouse. The secretary, bareheaded too, wore a jacket of authentic tweed; his turtleneck sweater was dead black, his hair was black too, varnished smooth to his skull; he spread before Ira a dummy newspaper page laid out to embrace the blank space for the photograph beneath the caption: APRIL LALEAR'S FATHER. Beneath the space was the legend: IRA EWING, PRESIDENT OF THE EWING REALTY CO.,—WILSHIRE BOULEVARD, BEVERLY HILLS.

"Is thirty percent all you could get?" Ira said. The secretary was young; he glared at Ira for an instant in vague impatient fury.

"Jesus, thirty percent is thirty percent. They are going to print a thousand extra copies and use our mailing list. It will be spread all up and down the Coast and as far East as Reno. What do you want? We can't expect them to put under

your picture, 'Turn to page fourteen for halpage ad,' can we?" Ira sat again with his eyes closed, waiting for his head to stop.

"All right," he said. "Are they ready now?"

"All set. You will have to go inside. They insisted it be inside, so everybody that sees it will know it is the courthouse."

"All right," Ira said. He got out; with his eyes half closed and the secretary at his elbow he mounted the steps and entered the courthouse. The reporter and the photographer were waiting but he did not see them yet; he was aware only of being enclosed in a gaping crowd which he knew would be mostly women, hearing the secretary and a policeman clearing the way in the corridor outside the courtroom door.

"This is O.K.," the secretary said. Ira stopped; the darkness was easier on his eyes though he did not open them yet; he just stood, hearing the secretary and the policeman herding the women, the faces, back; someone took him by the arm and turned him; he stood obediently; the magnesium flashed and glared, striking against his painful eyeballs like blows; he had a vision of wan faces craned to look at him from either side of a narrow human lane; with his eyes shut tight now he turned, blundering until the reporter in charge spoke to him:

"Just a minute, chief. We better get another one just in case." This time his eyes were tightly closed; the magnesium flashed, washed over them; in the thin acrid smell of it he turned and with the secretary again at his elbow he moved blindly back and into the sunlight and into his car. He gave no order this time, he just said, "Get me a drink." He rode with his eyes closed again while the car cleared the downtown traffic and then began to move quiet, powerful and fast under him; he rode so for a long while before he felt

the car swing into the palmbordered drive, slowing. It stopped; the doorman opened the door for him, speaking to him by name. The elevator boy called him by name too, stopping at the right floor without direction; he followed the corridor and knocked at a door and was fumbling for the key when the door opened upon a woman in a bathing suit beneath a loose beach cloak—a woman with treated hair also and brown eyes, who swung the door back for him to enter and then to behind him, looking at him with the quick bright faint serene smiling which only a woman nearing forty can give to a man to whom she is not married and from whom she has had no secrets physical and few mental over a long time of pleasant and absolute intimacy. She had been married though and divorced; she had a child, a daughter of fourteen, whom he was now keeping in boarding school. He looked at her, blinking, as she closed the door.

"You saw the papers," he said. She kissed him, not suddenly, without heat, in a continuation of the movement which closed the door, with a sort of warm envelopment; suddenly he cried, "I can't understand it! After all the advantages that . . . after all I tried to do for them—"

"Hush," she said. "Hush, now. Get into your trunks; I'll have a drink ready for you when you have changed. Will you eat some lunch if I have it sent up?"

"No. I don't want any lunch. —after all I have tried to give—"

"Hush, now. Get into your trunks while I fix you a drink. It's going to be swell at the beach." In the bedroom his bathing trunks and robe were laid out on the bed. He changed, hanging his suit in the closet where her clothes hung, where there hung already another suit of his and clothes for the evening. When he returned to the sitting room she had fixed the drink for him; she held the match to his cigarette and watched him sit down and take up the

glass, watching him still with that serene impersonal smiling. Now he watched her slip off the cape and kneel at the cellarette, filling a silver flask, in the bathing costume of the moment, such as ten thousand wax female dummies wore in ten thousand shop windows that summer, such as a hundred thousand young girls wore on California beaches; he looked at her, kneeling—back, buttocks and flanks trim enough, even firm enough (so firm in fact as to be a little on the muscular side, what with unremitting and perhaps even rigorous care) but still those of forty. But I don't want a young girl, he thought. Would to God that all young girls, all young female flesh, were removed, blasted even, from the earth. He finished the drink before she had filled the flask.

"I want another one," he said.

"All right," she said. "As soon as we get to the beach."

"No. Now."

"Let's go on to the beach first. It's almost three o'clock. Won't that be better?"

"Just so you are not trying to tell me I can't have another drink now."

"Of course not," she said, slipping the flask into the cape's pocket and looking at him again with that warm, faint, inscrutable smiling. "I just want to have a dip before the water gets too cold." They went down to the car; the Filipino knew this too: he held the door for her to slip under the wheel, then he got himself into the back. The car moved on; she drove well. "Why not lean back and shut your eyes," she told Ira, "and rest until we get to the beach? Then we will have a dip and a drink."

"I don't want to rest," he said. "I'm all right." But he did close his eyes again and again the car ran powerful, smooth, and fast beneath him, performing its afternoon's jaunt over the incredible distances of which the city was composed;

from time to time, had he looked, he could have seen the city in the bright soft vague hazy sunlight, random, scattered about the arid earth like so many gay scraps of paper blown without order, with its curious air of being rootless—of houses bright beautiful and gay, without basements or foundations, lightly attached to a few inches of light penetrable earth, lighter even than dust and laid lightly in turn upon the profound and primeval lava, which one good hard rain would wash forever from the sight and memory of man as a firehose flushes down a gutter—that city of almost incalculable wealth whose queerly appropriate fate it is to be erected upon a few spools of a substance whose value is computed in billions and which may be completely destroyed in that second's instant of a careless match between the moment of striking and the moment when the striker might have sprung and stamped it out.

"You saw your mother today," she said. "Has she—"

"Yes." He didn't open his eyes. "That damned Jap gave it to her. She asked me for money again. I found out what she wants with it. She wants to run, to go back to Nebraska. I told her, so did I. . . . If she went back there, she would not live until Christmas. The first month of winter would kill her. Maybe it wouldn't even take winter to do it."

She still drove, she still watched the road, yet somehow she had contrived to become completely immobile. "So that's what it is," she said.

He did not open his eyes. "What what is?"

"The reason she has been after you all this time to give her money, cash. Why, even when you won't do it, every now and then she asks you again."

"What what . . ." He opened his eyes, looking at her profile; he sat up suddenly. "You mean, she's been wanting to go back there all the time? That all these years she has been

asking me for money, that that was what she wanted with it?"

She glanced at him swiftly, then back to the road. "What else can it be? What else could she use money for?"

"Back there?" he said. "To those winters, that town, that way of living, where she's bound to know that the first winter would . . . You'd almost think she wanted to die, wouldn't you?"

"Hush," she said quickly. "Shhhhh. Don't say that. Don't say that about anybody." Already they could smell the sea; now they swung down toward it; the bright salt wind blew upon them, with the long-spaced sound of the rollers; now they could see it—the dark blue of water creaming into the blanched curve of beach dotted with bathers. "We won't go through the club," she said. "I'll park in here and we can go straight to the water." They left the Filipino in the car and descended to the beach. It was already crowded, bright and gay with movement. She chose a vacant space and spread her cape.

"Now that drink," he said.

"Have your dip first," she said. He looked at her. Then he slipped his robe off slowly; she took it and spread it beside her own; he looked down at her.

"Which is it? Will you always be too clever for me, or is it that every time I will always believe you again?"

She looked at him, bright, warm, fond and inscrutable. "Maybe both. Maybe neither. Have your dip; I will have the flask and a cigarette ready when you come out." When he came back from the water, wet, panting, his heart a little too hard and fast, she had the towel ready, and she lit the cigarette and uncapped the flask as he lay on the spread robes. She lay too, lifted to one elbow, smiling down at him, smoothing the water from his hair with the towel while he panted, waiting for his heart to slow and quiet. Steadily be-

tween them and the water, and as far up and down the beach as they could see, the bathers passed—young people, young men in trunks, and young girls in little more, with bronzed, unselfconscious bodies. Lying so, they seemed to him to walk along the rim of the world as though they and their kind alone inhabited it, and he with his forty-eight years were the forgotten last survivor of another race and kind, and they in turn precursors of a new race not yet seen on the earth: of men and women without age, beautiful as gods and goddesses, and with the minds of infants. He turned quickly and looked at the woman beside him—at the quiet face, the wise, smiling eyes, the grained skin and temples, the hairroots showing where the dye had grown out, the legs veined faint and blue and myriad beneath the skin. "You look better than any of them!" he cried. "You look better to me than any of them!"

III

THE JAPANESE GARDENER, with his hat on, stood tapping on the glass and beckoning and grimacing until old Mrs. Ewing went out to him. He had the afternoon's paper with its black headline: LALEAR WOMAN CREATES SCENE IN COURTROOM. "You take," the Japanese said. "Read while I catch water." But she declined; she just stood in the soft halcyon sunlight, surrounded by the myriad and almost fierce blooming of flowers, and looked quietly at the headline without even taking the paper, and that was all.

"I guess I won't look at the paper today," she said. "Thank you just the same." She returned to the living room. Save for the chair, it was exactly as it had been when she first saw it that day when her son brought her into it and told her that it was now her home and that her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren were now her family. It had changed

very little, and that which had altered was the part which her son knew nothing about, and that too had changed not at all in so long that she could not even remember now when she had added the last coin to the hoard. This was in a china vase on the mantel. She knew what was in it to the penny; nevertheless, she took it down and sat in the chair which she had brought all the way from Nebraska and emptied the coins and the worn timetable into her lap. The timetable was folded back at the page on which she had folded it the day she walked downtown to the ticket office and got it fifteen years ago, though that was so long ago now that the pencil circle about the name of the nearest junction point to Ewing, Nebraska, had faded away. But she did not need that either; she knew the distance to the exact halfmile, just as she knew the fare to the penny, and back in the early twenties when the railroads began to become worried and passenger fares began to drop, no broker ever watched the grain and utilities market any closer than she watched the railroad advertisements and quotations. Then at last the fares became stabilized with the fare back to Ewing thirteen dollars more than she had been able to save, and at a time when her source of income had ceased. This was the two grandchildren. When she entered the house that day twenty years ago and looked at the two babies for the first time, it was with diffidence and eagerness both. She would be dependent for the rest of her life, but she would give something in return for it. It was not that she would attempt to make another Ira and Samantha Ewing of them; she had made that mistake with her own son and had driven him from home. She was wiser now; she saw now that it was not the repetition of hardship: she would merely take what had been of value in hers and her husband's hard lives—that which they had learned through hardship and endurance of honor and courage and pride—

and transmit it to the children without their having to suffer the hardship at all, the travail and the despairs. She had expected that there would be some friction between her and the young daughter-in-law, but she had believed that her son, the actual Ewing, would be her ally; she had even reconciled herself after a year to waiting, since the children were still but babies; she was not alarmed, since they were Ewings too: after she had looked that first searching time at the two puttysoft little faces feature by feature, she had said it was because they were babies yet and so looked like no one. So she was content to bide and wait; she did not even know that her son was planning to move until he told her that the other house was bought and that the present one was to be hers until she died. She watched them go; she said nothing; it was not to begin then. It did not begin for five years, during which she watched her son making money faster and faster and easier and easier, gaining with apparent contemptible and contemptuous ease that substance for which in niggard amounts her husband had striven while still clinging with undeviating incorruptibility to honor and dignity and pride, and spending it, squandering it, in the same way. By that time she had given up the son and she had long since learned that she and her daughter-in-law were irrevocable and implacable moral enemies. It was in the fifth year. One day in her son's home she saw the two children take money from their mother's purse lying on a table. The mother did not even know how much she had in the purse; when the grandmother told her about it she became angry and dared the older woman to put it to the test. The grandmother accused the children, who denied the whole affair with perfectly straight faces. That was the actual break between herself and her son's family; after that she saw the two children only when the son would bring them with him occasionally on his unfailing daily visits. She

had a few broken dollars which she had brought from Nebraska and had kept intact for five years, since she had no need for money here; one day she planted one of the coins while the children were there, and when she went back to look, it was gone too. The next morning she tried to talk to her son about the children, remembering her experience with the daughter-in-law and approaching the matter indirectly, speaking generally of money. "Yes," the son said. "I'm making money. I'm making it fast while I can. I'm going to make a lot of it. I'm going to give my children luxuries and advantages that my father never dreamed a child might have."

"That's it," she said. "You make money too easy. This whole country is too easy for us Ewings. It may be all right for them that have been born here for generations; I don't know about that. But not for us."

"But these children were born here."

"Just one generation. The generation before that they were born in a sodroofed dugout on the Nebraska wheat frontier. And the one before that in a log house in Missouri. And the one before that in a Kentucky blockhouse with Indians around it. This world has never been easy for Ewings. Maybe the Lord never intended it to be."

"But it is from now on," he said; he spoke with a kind of triumph. "For you and me too. But mostly for them."

And that was all. When he was gone she sat quietly in the single Nebraska chair which she had taken out of storage—the first chair which the older Ira Ewing had bought for her after he built a house and in which she had rocked the younger Ira to sleep before he could walk, while the older Ira himself sat in the chair which he had made out of a flour barrel, grim, quiet and incorruptible, taking his earned twilight ease between a day and a day—telling herself quietly that that was all. Her next move was curiously

direct; there was something in it of the actual pioneer's opportunism, of taking immediate and cold advantage of Spartan circumstance; it was as though for the first time in her life she was able to use something, anything, which she had gained by bartering her youth and strong maturity against the Nebraska immensity, and this not in order to live further but in order to die; apparently she saw neither paradox in it nor dishonesty. She began to make candy and cake of the materials which her son bought for her on credit, and to sell them to the two grandchildren for the coins which their father gave them or which they perhaps purloined also from their mother's purse, hiding the coins in the vase with the timetable, watching the niggard hoard grow. But after a few years the children outgrew candy and cake, and then she had watched railroad fares go down and down and then stop thirteen dollars away. But she did not give up, even then. Her son had tried to give her a servant years ago and she had refused; she believed that when the time came, the right moment, he would not refuse to give her at least thirteen dollars of the money which she had saved him. Then this had failed. "Maybe it wasn't the right time," she thought. "Maybe I tried it too quick. I was surprised into it," she told herself, looking down at the heap of small coins in her lap. "Or maybe he was surprised into saying No. Maybe when he has had time . . ." She roused; she put the coins back into the vase and set it on the mantel again, looking at the clock as she did so. It was just four, two hours yet until time to start supper. The sun was high; she could see the water from the sprinkler flashing and glinting in it as she went to the window. It was still high, still afternoon; the mountains stood serene and drab against it; the city, the land, lay sprawled and myriad beneath it—the land, the earth which spawned a thousand new faiths, nostrums and cures each year but no disease to even disprove them on—

beneath the golden days unmarred by rain or weather, the changeless monotonous beautiful days without end countless out of the halcyon past and endless into the halcyon future.

"I will stay here and live forever," she said to herself.

